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THE JAMESONS

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We passed the bucket from hand to hand, and the boy at the end flung it into Mrs. Liscom's front entry.

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The Jamesons

by
Mary E. Wilkins

Author of "A Humble Romance,"
"A New England Nun," "Pembroke," "The People of Our
Neighborhood," etc.

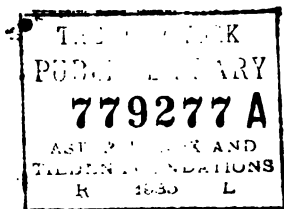


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THE JAMESONS

I

THEY ARRIVE

UNTIL that summer nobody in our village had ever taken boarders. There had been no real necessity for it, and we had always been rather proud of the fact. While we were certainly not rich—there was not one positively rich family among us—we were comfortably provided with all the necessities of life. We did not need to open our houses, and our closets, and our bureau drawers, and give the freedom of our domestic hearths, and, as it were, our household gods for playthings, to strangers and their children.

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Many of us had to work for our daily bread, but, we were thankful to say, not in that way. We prided ourselves because there was no summer hotel with a demoralizing bowling-alley, and one of those dangerous chutes, in our village. We felt forbiddingly calm and superior when now and then some strange city people from Grover, the large summer resort six miles from us, travelled up and down our main street seeking board in vain. We plumed ourselves upon our reputation of not taking boarders for love or money.

Nobody had dreamed that there was to be a break at last in our long-established custom, and nobody dreamed that the break was to be made in such a quarter. One of the most well-to-do, if not the most well-to-do, of us all, took the first boarders ever taken in Linnville. When Amelia Powers heard of it she said, "Them that has, gits."

On the afternoon of the first day of

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June, six years ago, I was sewing at my sitting-room window. I was making a white muslin dress for little Alice, my niece, to wear to the Seventeenth-of-June picnic. I had been sitting there alone all the afternoon, and it was almost four o'clock when I saw Amelia Powers, who lives opposite, and who had been sewing at her window—I had noticed her arm moving back and forth, disturbing the shadows of the horse-chestnut tree in the yard—fling open her front door, run out on the piazza, and stand peering around the corner post, with her neck so stretched that it looked twice as long as before. Then her sister Candace, who has poor health and seldom ventures out-of-doors, threw up the front chamber window and leaned out as far as she was able, and stared with her hand shading her eyes from the sun. I could just see her head through an opening in the horse-chestnut branches.

Then I heard another door open, and

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Mrs. Peter Jones, who lives in the house next below the Powers', came running out. She ran down the walk to her front gate and leaned over, all twisted sideways, to see.

Then I heard voices, and there were Adeline Ketchum and her mother coming down the street, all in a flutter of hurry. Adeline is slender and nervous; her elbows jerked out, her chin jerked up, and her skirts switched her thin ankles; Mrs. Ketchum is very stout, and she walked with a kind of quivering flounce. Her face was blazing, and I knew her bonnet was on hindside before—I was sure that the sprig of purple flowers belonged on the front.

When Adeline and her mother reached Mrs. Peter Jones' gate they stopped, and they all stood there together looking. Then I saw Tommy Gregg racing along, and I felt positive that his mother had sent him to see what the matter was. She is a good woman, but the most curi-

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ous person in our village. She never seems to have enough affairs of her own to thoroughly amuse her. I never saw a boy run as fast as Tommy did—as if his mother's curiosity and his own were a sort of motor compelling him to his utmost speed. His legs seemed never to come out of their running crooks, and his shock of hair was fairly stiffened out behind with the wind.

Then I began to wonder if it were possible there was a fire anywhere. I ran to my front door and called:

"Tommy! Tommy!" said I, "where is the fire?"

Tommy did not hear me, but all of a sudden the fire-bell began to ring.

Then I ran across the street to Mrs. Peter Jones' gate, and Amelia Powers came hurrying out of her yard.

"Where is it? Oh, where is it?" said she, and Candace put her head out of the window and called out, "Where is it? Is it near here?"

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We all sniffed for smoke and strained our eyes for a red fire glare on the horizon, but we could neither smell nor see anything unusual.

Pretty soon we heard the fire-engine coming, and Amelia Powers cried out: "Oh, it's going to Mrs. Liscom's! It's her house! It's Mrs. Liscom's house!"

Candace Powers put her head farther out of the window, and screamed in a queer voice that echoed like a parrot's, "Oh, 'Melia! 'Melia! it's Mrs. Liscom's, it's Mrs. Liscom's, and the wind's this way! Come, quick, and help me get out the best feather bed, and the counterpane ~~that~~ mother knit! Quick! Quick!"

Amelia had to run in and quiet Candace, who was very apt to have a bad spell when she was over-excited, and the rest of us started for the fire.

As we hurried down the street I asked Mrs. Jones how she had known there was a fire in the first place, for I supposed that was why she had run out to her front

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door and looked down the street. Then I learned about the city boarders. She and Amelia, from the way they faced at their sitting-room windows, had seen the Grover stage-coach stop at Mrs. Liscom's, and had run out to see the boarders alight. Mrs. Jones said there were five of them—the mother, grandmother, two daughters, and a son.

I said that I did not know Mrs. Liscom was going to take boarders; I was very much surprised.

"I suppose she thought she would earn some money and have some extra things," said Mrs. Jones.

"It must have been that," said Mrs. Ketchum, panting—she was almost out of breath—"for, of course, the Liscoms don't need the money."

I laughed and said I thought not. I felt a little pride about it, because Mrs. Liscom was a second cousin of my husband, and he used to think a great deal of her.

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"They must own that nice place clear, if it ain't going to burn to the ground, and have something in the bank besides," assented Mrs. Peter Jones.

Ever so many people were running down the street with us, and the air seemed full of that brazen clang of the fire-bell; still we could not see any fire, nor even smell any smoke, until we got to the head of the lane where the Liscom house stands a few rods from the main street.

The lane was about choked up with the fire-engine, the hose-cart, the fire department in their red shirts, and, I should think, half the village. We climbed over the stone wall into Mrs. Liscom's oat-field; it was hard work for Mrs. Ketchum, but Mrs. Jones and I pushed and Adeline pulled, and then we ran along close to the wall toward the house. We certainly began to smell smoke, though we still could not see any fire. The firemen were racing in and out of

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the house, bringing out the furniture, as were some of the village boys, and the engine was playing upon the south end, where the kitchen is.

Mrs. Peter Jones, who is very small and alert, said suddenly that it looked to her as if the smoke were coming out of the kitchen chimney, but Mrs. Ketchum said of course it was on fire inside in the woodwork. "Oh, only to think of Mrs. Liscom's nice house being all burned up, and what a dreadful reception for those boarders!" she groaned out.

I never saw such a hubbub, and apparently over nothing at all, as there was. There was a steady yell of fire from a crowd of boys who seemed to enjoy it; the water was swishing, the firemen's arms were pumping in unison, and everybody generally running in aimless circles like a swarm of ants. Then we saw the boarders coming out. "Oh, the house must be all in a light blaze inside!" groaned Mrs. Ketchum.

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There were five of the boarders. The mother, a large, fair woman with a long, massive face, her reddish hair crinkling and curling around it in a sort of ivy-tendril fashion, came first. Her two daughters, in blue gowns, with pretty, agitated faces, followed; then the young son, fairly teetering with excitement; then the grandmother, a little, tremulous old lady in an auburn wig.

The woman at the head carried a bucket, and what should she do but form her family into a line toward the well at the north side of the house where we were!

Of course, the family did not nearly reach to the well, and she beckoned to us imperatively. "Come immediately!" said she; "if the men of this village have no head in an emergency like this, let the women arise! Come immediately."

So Mrs. Peter Jones, Mrs. Ketchum, Adeline, and I stepped into the line, and the mother boarder filled the bucket at

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the well, and we passed it back from hand to hand, and the boy at the end flung it into Mrs. Liscom's front entry all over her nice carpet.

Then suddenly we saw Caroline Liscom appear. She snatched the bucket out of the hands of the boy boarder and gave it a toss into the lilac-bush beside the door; then she stood there, looking as I had never seen her look before. Caroline Liscom has always had the reputation of being a woman of a strong character; she is manifestly the head of her family. It is always, "Mrs. Liscom's house," and "Mrs. Liscom's property," instead of Mr. Liscom's.

It is always understood that, though Mr. Liscom is the nominal voter in town matters, not a selectman goes into office with Mr. Liscom's vote unless it is authorized by Mrs. Liscom. Mr. Liscom is, so to speak, seldom taken without Mrs. Liscom's indorsement.

Of course, Mrs. Liscom being such a

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character has always more or less authority in her bearing, but that day she displayed a real majesty which I had never seen in her before. She stood there a second, then she turned and made a backward and forward motion of her arm as if she were sweeping, and directly red-shirted firemen and boys began to fly out of the house as if impelled by it.

"You just get out of my house; every one of you!" said Caroline in a loud but slow voice, as if she were so angry that she was fairly reining herself in; and they got out. Then she called to the firemen who were working the engine, and they heard her above all the uproar.

"You stop drenching my house with water, and go home!" said she.

Everybody began to hush and stare, but Tommy Gregg gave one squeaking cry of fire as if in defiance.

"There is no fire," said Caroline Liscom. "My house is not on fire, and has not been on fire. I am getting tea, and

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the kitchen chimney always smokes when the wind is west. I don't thank you, any of you, for coming here and turning my house upside down and drenching it with water, and lugging my furniture out-of-doors. Now you can go home. I don't see what fool ever sent you here!"

The engine stopped playing, and you could hear the water dripping off the south end of the house. The windows were streaming as if there had been a shower. Everybody looked abashed, and the chief engineer of the fire department—who is a little nervous man who always works as if the river were on fire and he had started it—asked meekly if they shouldn't bring the furniture back.

"No," said Caroline Liscom, "I want you to go home, and that is all I do want of you."

Then the mother boarder spoke—she was evidently not easily put down. "I refuse to return to the house or to allow my family to do so unless I am officially

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notified by the fire department that the fire is extinguished," said she.

"Then you can stay out-of-doors," said Caroline Liscom, and we all gasped to hear her, though we secretly admired her for it.

The boarder glared at her in a curious kind of way, like a broadside of stoniness, but Caroline did not seem to mind it at all. Then the boarder changed her tactics like a general on the verge of defeat. She sidled up to Mr. Spear, the chief engineer, who was giving orders to drag home the engine, and said in an unexpectedly sweet voice, like a trickle of honey off the face of a rock: "My good man, am I to understand that I need apprehend no further danger from fire! I ask for the sake of my precious family."

Mr. Spear looked at her as if she had spoken to him in Choctaw, and she was obliged to ask him over again. "My good man," said she, "*is* the fire out?"

Mr. Spear looked at her as if he were half daft then, but he answered: "Yes,

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ma'am, yes, ma'am, certainly, ma'am, no danger at all, ma'am." Then he went on ordering the men: "A leetle more to the right, boys! All together!"

"Thank you, my good man, your word is sufficient," said the boarder, though Mr. Spear did not seem to hear her.

Then she sailed into the house, and her son, her two daughters, and the grandmother after her. Mrs. Peter Jones and Adeline and her mother went home, but I ventured, since I was a sort of relation, to go in and offer to help Caroline set things to rights. She thanked me, and said that she did not want any help; when Jacob and Harry came home they would set the furniture in out of the yard.

"I am sorry for you, Caroline," said I.

"Look at my house, Sophia Lane," said she, and that was all she would say. She shut her mouth tight over that. That house was enough to make a strong-minded woman like Caroline dumb, and send a weak one into hysterics. It was

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dripping with water, and nearly all the furniture out in the yard piled up pell-mell. I could not see how she was going to get supper for the boarders: the kitchen fire was out and the stove drenched, with a panful of biscuits in the oven.

"What are you going to give them for supper, Caroline?" said I, and she just shook her head. I knew that those boarders would have to take what they could get, or go without.

When Caroline was in any difficulty there never was any help for her, except from the working of circumstances to their own salvation. I thought I might as well go home. I offered to give her some pie or cake if hers were spoiled, but she only shook her head again, and I knew she must have some stored away in the parlor china-closet, where the water had not penetrated.

I went through the house to the front entry, thinking I would go out the front door—the side one was dripping as if it

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were under a waterfall. Just as I reached it I heard a die-away voice from the front chamber say, "My good woman."

I did not dream that I was addressed, never having been called by that name, though always having hoped that I was a good woman.

So I kept right on. Then I heard a despairing sigh, and the voice said, "You speak to her, Harriet."

Then I heard another voice, very sweet and a little timid, "Will you please step upstairs? Mamma wishes to speak to you."

I began to wonder if they were talking to me. I looked up, and there discovered a pretty, innocent, rosy little face, peering over the balustrade at the head of the stairs. "Will you please step upstairs?" said she again, in the same sweet tones. "Mamma wishes to speak to you."

I have a little weakness of the heart, and do not like to climb stairs more than I am positively obliged to; it always puts

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me so out of breath. I sleep downstairs on that account. I looked at Caroline's front stairs, which are rather steep, with some hesitation. I felt shaken, too, on account of the alarm of fire. Then I heard the first voice again with a sort of languishing authority: "My good woman, will you be so kind as to step upstairs immediately?"

I went upstairs. The girl who had spoken to me—I found afterward that she was the elder of the daughters—motioned me to go into the north chamber. I found them all there. The mother, Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson, as I afterward knew her name to be, was lying on the bed, her head propped high with pillows; the younger daughter was fanning her, and she was panting softly as if she were almost exhausted. The grandmother sat beside the north window, with a paper-covered book on her knees. She was eating something from a little white box on the window-sill. The boy was at an-

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other window, also with a book in which he did not seem to be interested. He looked up at me, as I entered, with a most peculiar expression of mingled innocence and shyness which was almost terror. I could not see why the boy should possibly be afraid of me, but I learned afterward that it was either his natural attitude or natural expression. He was either afraid of every mortal thing or else appeared to be. The singular elevated arch of his eyebrows over his wide-open blue eyes, and his mouth, which was always parted a little, no doubt served to give this impression. He was a pretty boy, with a fair pink-and-white complexion, and long hair curled like a girl's, which looked odd to me, for he was quite large.

Mrs. Jameson beckoned me up to the bed with one languid finger, as if she could not possibly do more. I began to think that perhaps she had some trouble with her heart like myself, and the fire had overcome her, and I felt very sympathetic.

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"I am sorry you have had such an unpleasant experience," I began, but she cut me short.

"My good woman," said she in little more than a whisper, "do you know of any house in a sanitary location where we can obtain board immediately? I am very particular about the location. There must be no standing water near the house, there must not be trees near on account of the dampness, the neighbors must not keep hens—of course, the people of the house must not keep hens—and the woman must have an even temper. I must particularly insist upon an even temper. My nerves are exceedingly weak; I cannot endure such a rasping manner as that which I have encountered to-day."

When she stopped and looked at me for an answer I was so astonished that I did not know what to say. There she was, just arrived; had not eaten one meal in the house, and wanting to find another boarding-place.

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Finally I said, rather stupidly I suppose, that I doubted if she could find another boarding-place in our village as good as the one which she already had.

She gave another sigh, as if of the most determined patience. "Have I not already told you, my good woman," said she, "that I cannot endure such a rasping manner and voice as that of the woman of the house? It is most imperative that I have another boarding-place at once."

She said this in a manner which nettled me a little, as if I had boarding-places, for which she had paid liberally and had a right to demand, in my hand, and was withholding them from her. I replied that I knew of no other boarding-place of any kind whatsoever in the village. Then she looked at me in what I suppose was meant to be an ingratiating way.

"My good woman," said she, "you look very neat and tidy yourself, and I don't doubt are a good plain cook; I am

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willing to try your house if it is not surrounded by trees and there is no standing water near; I do not object to running water."

In the midst of this speech the elder daughter had said in a frightened way, "Oh, mamma!" but her mother had paid no attention. As for myself, I was angry. The memory of my two years at Wardville Young Ladies' Seminary in my youth and my frugally independent life as wife and widow was strong upon me. I had read and improved my mind. I was a prominent member of the Ladies' Literary Society of our village: I wrote papers which were read at the meetings; I felt, in reality, not one whit below Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson, and, moreover, large sleeves were the fashion, and my sleeves were every bit as large as hers, though she had just come from the city. That added to my conviction of my own importance.

"Madam," said I, "I do not take board-

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ers. I have never taken boarders, and I never shall take boarders." Then I turned and went out of the room, and downstairs, with, it seemed to me, much dignity.

However, Mrs. Jameson was not impressed by it, for she called after me: "My good woman, will you please tell Mrs. Liscom that I must have some hot water to make my health food with immediately? Tell her to send up a pitcher at once, very hot."

I did not tell Caroline about the hot water. I left that for them to manage themselves. I did not care to mention hot water with Caroline's stove as wet as if it had been dipped in the pond, even if I had not been too indignant at the persistent ignoring of my own dignity. I went home and found Louisa Field, my brother's widow, and her little daughter Alice, who live with me, already there. Louisa keeps the district school, and with her salary, besides the little which my brother left her, gets along very comfort-

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ably. I have a small sum in bank, besides my house, and we have plenty to live on, even if we don't have much to spare.

Louisa was full of excitement over the false alarm of fire, and had heard a reason for it which we never fairly knew to be true, though nearly all the village believed it. It seems that the little Jameson boy, so the story ran, had peeped into the kitchen and had seen it full of smoke from Caroline's smoky chimney when she was kindling the fire; then had run out into the yard, and seeing the smoke out there too, and being of such an exceedingly timid temperament, had run out to the head of the lane calling fire, and had there met Tommy Gregg, who had spread the alarm and been the means of calling out the fire department.

Indeed, the story purported to come from Tommy Gregg, who declared that the boy at Liscom's had "hollered" fire, and when he was asked where it was had told him at Liscom's. However that may

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have been, I looked around at our humble little home, at the lounge which I had covered myself, at the threadbare carpet on the sitting-room floor, at the wall-paper which was put on the year before my husband died, at the vases on the shelf, which had belonged to my mother, and I was very thankful that I did not care for "extra things" or new furniture and carpets enough to take boarders who made one feel as if one were simply a colonist of their superior state, and the Republic was over and gone.

II

WE BECOME ACQUAINTED WITH THEM

IT was certainly rather unfortunate, as far as the social standing of the Jamesons among us was concerned, that they brought Grandma Cobb with them.

Everybody spoke of her as Grandma Cobb before she had been a week in the village. Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson always called her Madam Cobb, but that made no difference. People in our village had not been accustomed to address old ladies as madam, and they did not take kindly to it. Grandma Cobb was of a very sociable disposition, and she soon developed the habit of dropping into the village houses at all hours of the day and evening. She was an early riser, and all the rest of her family slept late, and she

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probably found it lonesome. She often made a call as early as eight o'clock in the morning, and she came as late as ten o'clock in the evening. When she came in the morning she talked, and when she came in the evening she sat in her chair and nodded. She often kept the whole family up, and it was less exasperating when she came in the morning, though it was unfortunate for the Jamesons.

If a bulletin devoted to the biography of the Jameson family had been posted every week on the wall of the town house it could have been no more explicit than was Grandma Cobb. Whether we would or not we soon knew all about them; the knowledge was fairly forced upon us. We knew that Mr. H. Boardman Jameson had been very wealthy, but had lost most of his money the year before through the failure of a bank. We knew that his wealth had all been inherited, and that he would never have been, in Grandma Cobb's opinion, capable of earning it him-

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self. We knew that he had obtained, through the influence of friends, a position in the custom-house, and we knew the precise amount of his salary. We knew that the Jamesons had been obliged to give up their palatial apartments in New York and take a humble flat in a less fashionable part of the city. We knew that they had always spent their summers at their own place at the seashore, and that this was the first season of their sojourn in a little country village in a plain house. We knew how hard a struggle it had been for them to come here; we knew just how much they paid for their board, how Mrs. Jameson never wanted anything for breakfast but an egg and a hygienic biscuit, and had health food in the middle of the forenoon and afternoon.

We also knew just how old they all were, and how the H. in Mr. Jameson's name stood for Hiram. We knew that Mrs. Jameson had never liked the name—might, in fact, have refused to marry

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on that score had not Grandma Cobb reasoned with her and told her that he was a worthy man with money, and she not as young as she had been; and how she compromised by always using the abbreviation, both in writing and speaking. "She always calls him H," said Grandma Cobb, "and I tell her sometimes it doesn't look quite respectful to speak to her husband as if he were a part of the alphabet." Grandma Cobb, if the truth had been told, was always in a state of covert rebellion against her daughter.

Grandma Cobb was always dressed in a black silk gown which seemed sumptuous to the women of our village. They could scarcely reconcile it with the statement that the Jamesons had lost their money. Black silk of a morning was stupendous to them, when they reflected how they had, at the utmost, but one black silk, and that guarded as if it were cloth of gold, worn only upon the grandest occasions, and designed, as they knew

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in their secret hearts, though they did not proclaim it, for their last garment of earth. Grandma Cobb always wore a fine lace cap also, which should, according to the opinions of the other old ladies of the village, have been kept sacred for other women's weddings or her own funeral. She used her best gold-bowed spectacles every day, and was always leaving them behind her in the village houses, and little Tommy or Annie had to run after her with a charge not to lose them, for nobody knew how much they cost.

Grandma Cobb always carried about with her a paper-covered novel and a box of cream peppermints. She ate the peppermints and freely bestowed them upon others; the novel she never read. She said quite openly that she only carried it about to please her daughter, who had literary tastes. "She belongs to a Shakespeare Club, and a Browning Club, and a Current Literature Club," said Grandma Cobb.

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We concluded that she had, feeling altogether incapable of even carrying about Shakespeare and Browning, compromised with peppermints and current literature.

"That book must be current literature," said Mrs. Ketchum one day, "but I looked into it when she was at our house, and I should not want Adeline to read it."

After a while people looked upon Grandma Cobb's book with suspicion; but since she always carried it, thereby keeping it from her grandchildren, and never read it, we agreed that it could not do much harm.

The very first time that I saw Grandma Cobb, at Caroline Liscom's, she had that book. I knew it by the red cover and a baking-powder advertisement on the back; and the next time also—that was at the seventeenth-of-June picnic.

The whole Jameson family went to the picnic, rather to our surprise. I think people had a fancy that Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson would be above our little

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rural picnic. We had yet to understand Mrs. Jameson, and learn that, however much she really held herself above and aloof, she had not the slightest intention of letting us alone, perhaps because she thoroughly believed in her own non-mixable quality. Of course it would always be quite safe for oil to go to a picnic with water, no matter how exclusive it might be.

The picnic was in Leonard's grove, and young and old were asked. The seventeenth-of-June picnic is a regular institution in our village. I went with Louisa, and little Alice in her new white muslin dress; the child had been counting on it for weeks. We were nearly all assembled when the Jamesons arrived. Half a dozen of us had begun to lay the table for luncheon, though we were not to have it for an hour or two. We always thought it a good plan to make all our preparations in season. We were collecting the baskets and boxes, and it did look

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as if we were to have an unusual feast that year. Those which we peeped into appeared especially tempting. Mrs. Nathan Butters had brought a great loaf of her rich fruit cake, a kind for which she is famous in the village, and Mrs. Sim White had brought two of her whipped-cream pies. Mrs. Ketchum had brought six mince pies, which were a real rarity in June, and Flora Clark had brought a six-quart pail full of those jumbles she makes, so rich that if you drop one it crumbles to pieces. Then there were two great pinky hams and a number of chickens. Louisa and I had brought a chicken; we had one of ours killed, and I had roasted it the day before.

I remarked to Mrs. Ketchum that we should have an unusually nice dinner; and so we should have had if it had not been for Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson.

The Jamesons came driving into the grove in the Liscom carryall and their

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buggy. Mr. Jacob Liscom was in charge of the carryall, and the Jameson boy was on the front seat with him; on the back seat were Grandma, or Madam Cobb, and the younger daughter. Harry Liscom drove the bay horse in the buggy, and Mrs. Jameson and Harriet were with him, he sitting between them, very uncomfortably, as it appeared—his knees were touching the dasher, as he is a tall young man.

Caroline Liscom did not come, and I did not wonder at it for one. She must have thought it a good chance to rest one day from taking boarders. We were surprised that Mrs. Jameson, since she is such a stout woman, did not go in the carryall, and let either her younger daughter or the boy go with Harry and Harriet in the buggy. We heard afterward that she thought it necessary that she should go with them as a chaperon. That seemed a little strange to us, since our village girls were all so well conducted

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that we thought nothing of their going buggy-riding with a good young man like Harry Liscom; he is a church member and prominent in the Sunday-school, and this was in broad daylight and the road full of other carriages. So people stared and smiled a little to see Harry driving in with his knees braced against the dasher, and the buggy canting to one side with the weight of Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson. He looked rather shamefaced, I thought, though he is a handsome, brave young fellow, and commonly carries himself boldly enough. Harriet Jameson looked very pretty, though her costume was not, to my way of thinking, quite appropriate. However, I suppose that she was not to blame, poor child, and it may easily be more embarrassing to have old fine clothes than old poor ones. Really, Harriet Jameson would have looked better dressed that day in an old calico gown than the old silk one which she wore. Her waist was blue

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silk with some limp chiffon at the neck and sleeves, and her skirt was old brown silk all frayed at the bottom and very shiny. There were a good many spots on it, too, and some mud stains, though it had not rained for two weeks.

However, the girl looked pretty, and her hair was done with a stylish air, and she wore her old Leghorn hat, with its wreath of faded French flowers, in a way which was really beyond our girls.

And as for Harry Liscom, it was plain enough to be seen that, aside from his discomfiture at the close attendance of Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson, he was blissfully satisfied and admiring. I was rather sorry to see it on his account, though I had nothing against the girl. I think, on general principles, that it is better usually for a young man of our village to marry one of his own sort; that he has a better chance of contentment and happiness. However, in this case it seemed quite likely that there would be no chance of

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married happiness at all. It did not look probable that Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson would smile upon her eldest daughter's marriage with the son of "a good woman," and I was not quite sure as to what Caroline Liscom would say.

Mr. Jacob Liscom is a pleasant-faced, mild-eyed man, very tall and slender. He lifted out the Jameson boy, who did not jump out over the wheel, as boys generally do when arriving at a picnic, and then he tipped over the front seat and helped out Madam Cobb, and the younger daughter, whose name was Sarah. We had not thought much of such old-fashioned names as Harriet and Sarah for some years past in our village, and it seemed rather odd taste in these city people. We considered Hattie and Sadie much prettier. Generally the Harriets and Sarahs endured only in the seclusion of the family Bible and the baptismal records. Quite a number of the ladies had met Mrs. Jameson, having either

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called at Mrs. Liscom's and seen her there, or having spoken to her at church; and as for Grandma Cobb, she had had time to visit nearly every house in the village, as I knew, though she had not been to mine. Grandma Cobb got out, all smiling, and Jacob Liscom handed her the box of peppermints and the paper-covered novel, and then Harry Liscom helped out Harriet and her mother.

Mrs. Jameson walked straight up to us who were laying the table, and Harry followed her with a curiously abashed expression, carrying a great tin cracker-box in one hand and a large basket in the other. We said good-morning as politely as we knew how to Mrs. Jameson, and she returned it with a brisk air which rather took our breaths away, it was so indicative of urgent and very pressing business. Then, to our utter astonishment, up she marched to the nearest basket on the table and deliberately took off the cover and began taking out the

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contents. It happened to be Mrs. Nathan Butters' basket. Mrs. Jameson lifted out the great loaf of fruit cake and set it on the table with a contemptuous thud, as it seemed to us; then she took out a cranberry pie and a frosted apple pie, and set them beside it. She opened Mrs. Peter Jones' basket next, and Mrs. Jones stood there all full of nervous twitches and saw her take out a pile of ham sandwiches and a loaf of chocolate cake and a bottle of pickles. She went on opening the baskets and boxes one after another, and we stood watching her. Finally she came to the pail full of jumbles, and her hand slipped and the most of them fell to the ground and were a mass of crumbles.

Then Mrs. Jameson spoke; she had not before said a word. "These are enough to poison the whole village," said she, and she sniffed with a proud uplifting of her nose.

I am sure that a little sound, something between a groan and a gasp, came from

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us, but no one spoke. I felt that it was fortunate, and yet I was almost sorry that Flora Clark, who made those jumbles, was not there; she had gone to pick wild flowers with her Sunday-school class. Flora is very high-spirited and very proud of her jumbles, and I knew that she would not have stood it for a minute to hear them called poison. There would certainly have been words then and there, for Flora is afraid of nobody. She is a smart, handsome woman, and would have been married long ago if it had not been for her temper.

Mrs. Jameson did not attempt to gather up the jumbles; she just went on after that remark of hers, opening the rest of the things; there were only one or two more. Then she took the cracker-box which Harry had brought; he had stolen away to put up his horse, and it looked to me very much as if Harriet had stolen away with him, for I could not see her anywhere.

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Mrs. Jameson lifted this cracker-box on to the table and opened it. It was quite full of thick, hard-looking biscuits, or crackers. She laid them in a pile beside the other things; then she took up the basket and opened that. There was another kind of a cracker in that, and two large papers of something. When everything was taken out she pointed at the piles of eatables on the table, and addressed us: "Ladies, attention!" rapping slightly with a spoon at the same time. Her voice was very sweet, with a curious kind of forced sweetness: "Ladies, attention! I wish you to carefully observe the food upon the table before us. I wish you to consider it from the standpoint of wives and mothers of families. There is the food which you have brought, unwholesome, indigestible; there is mine, approved of by the foremost physicians and men of science of the day. For ten years I have had serious trouble with the alimentary canal, and this food has kept

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me in strength and vigor. Had I attempted to live upon your fresh biscuits, your frosted cakes, your rich pastry, I should be in my grave. One of those biscuits which you see there before you is equal in nourishment to six of your indigestible pies, or every cake upon the table. The great cause of the insanity and dyspepsia so prevalent among the rural classes is rich pie and cake. I feel it my duty to warn you. I hope, ladies, that you will consider carefully what I have said."

With that, Mrs. Jameson withdrew herself a little way and sat down under a tree on a cushion which had been brought in the carryall. We looked at one another, but we did not say anything for a few minutes.

Finally, Mrs. White, who is very good-natured, remarked that she supposed that she meant well, and she had better put her pies back in the basket or they would dry up. We all began putting back the things which Mrs. Jameson had taken

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out, except the broken jumbles, and were very quiet. However, we could not help feeling astonished and aggrieved at what Mrs. Jameson had said about the insanity and dyspepsia in our village, since we could scarcely remember one case of insanity, and very few of us had to be in the least careful as to what we ate. Mrs. Peter Jones did say in a whisper that if Mrs. Jameson had had dyspepsia ten years on those hard biscuits it was more than any of us had had on our cake and pie. We left the biscuits, and the two paper packages which Mrs. Jameson had brought, in a heap on the table just where she had put them.

After we had replaced the baskets we all scattered about, trying to enjoy ourselves in the sweet pine woods, but it was hard work, we were so much disturbed by what had happened. We wondered uneasily, too, what Flora Clark would say about her jumbles. We were all quiet, peaceful people who dreaded

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altercation; it made our hearts beat too fast. Taking it altogether, we felt very much as if some great, overgrown bird of another species had gotten into our village nest, and we were in the midst of an awful commotion of strange wings and beak. Still we agreed that Mrs. Jameson had probably meant well.

Grandma Cobb seemed to be enjoying herself. She was moving about, her novel under her arm and her peppermint box in her hand, holding up her gown daintily in front. She spoke to everybody affably, and told a number confidentially that her daughter was very delicate about her eating, but she herself believed in eating what you liked. Harriet and Harry Liscom were still missing, and so were the younger daughter, Sarah, and the boy. The boy's name, by the way, was Cobb, his mother's maiden name. That seemed strange to us, but it possibly would not have seemed so had it been a prettier name.

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Just before lunch-time Cobb and his sister Sarah appeared, and they were in great trouble. Jonas Green, who owns the farm next the grove, was with them, and actually had Cobb by the hair, holding all his gathered-up curls tight in his fist. He held Sarah by one arm, too, and she was crying. Cobb was crying, too, for that matter, and crying out loud like a baby.

Jonas Green is a very brusque man, and he did look as angry as I had ever seen any one, and when I saw what those two were carrying I did not much wonder. Their hands were full of squash blossoms and potato blossoms, and Jonas Green's garden is the pride of his life.

Jonas Green marched straight up to Mrs. Jameson under her tree, and said in a loud voice: "Ma'am, if this boy and girl are yours I think it is about time you taught them better than to tramp through folks' fields picking things that don't belong to them, and I expect what

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I've lost in squashes and potatoes to be made good to me."

We all waited, breathless, and Mrs. Jameson put on her eyeglasses and looked up. Then she spoke sweetly.

"My good man," said she, "if, when you come to dig your squashes, you find less than usual, and when you come to pick your potatoes the bushes are not in as good condition as they generally are, you may come to me and I will make it right with you."

Mrs. Jameson spoke with the greatest dignity and sweetness, and we almost felt as if she were the injured party, in spite of all those squash and potato blossoms. As for Jonas Green, he stared at her for the space of a minute, then he gave a loud laugh, let go of the boy and girl, and strode away. We heard him laughing to himself as he went; all through his life the mention of potato bushes and digging squashes was enough to send him into fits of laughter. It was

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the joke of his lifetime, for Jonas Green had never been a merry man, and it was probably worth more than the vegetables which he had lost. I pitied Cobb and Sarah, they were so frightened, and got hold of them myself and comforted them. Sarah was just such another little timid, open-mouthed, wide-eyed sort of thing as her brother, and they were merely picking flowers, as they supposed.

"I never saw such beautiful yellow flowers," Sarah said, sobbing and looking ruefully at her great bouquet of squash blossoms. This little Sarah, who was only twelve, and very small and childish for her age, said sooner and later many ignorant, and yet quaintly innocent things about our country life, which were widely repeated. It was Sarah who said, when she was offered some honey at a village tea-drinking, "Oh, will you please tell me what time you drive home your bees? and do they give honey twice a day like the cows?" It was Sarah who, when

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her brother was very anxious to see the pigs on Mr. White's farm, said, "Oh, be quiet, Cobb, dear; it is too late to-night; the pigs must have gone into their holes."

I think poor Cobb and Sarah might have had a pleasant time at the picnic, after all—for my little Alice made friends with them, and Mrs. Sim White's Charlie—had it not been for their mother's obliging them to eat her hygienic biscuits for their luncheons. It was really pitiful to see them looking so wistfully at the cake and pie. I had a feeling of relief that all the rest of us were not obliged to make our repast of hygienic bread. I had a fear lest Mrs. Jameson might try to force us to do so. However, all she did was to wait until we were fairly started upon our meal, and then send around her children with her biscuits, following them herself with the most tender entreaties that we would put aside that unwholesome food and not risk our pre-

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cious lives. She would not, however, allow us to drink our own coffee—about that she was firm. She insisted upon our making some hygienic coffee which she had brought from the city, and we were obliged to yield, or appear in a very stubborn and ungrateful light. The coffee was really very good, and we did not mind. The other parcel which she had brought contained a health food, to be made into a sort of porridge with hot water, and little cups of that were passed around, Mrs. Jameson's face fairly beaming with benevolence the while, and there was no doubt that she was entirely in earnest.

Still, we were all so disturbed—that is, all of us elder people—that I doubt if anybody enjoyed that luncheon unless it was Grandma Cobb. She did not eat hygienic biscuits, but did eat cake and pie in unlimited quantities. I was really afraid that she would make herself ill with Mrs. Butters' fruit cake. One thing

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was a great relief, to me at least: Flora Clark did not know the true story of her jumbles until some time afterward. Mrs. White told her that the pail had been upset and they were broken, and we were all so sorry; and she did not suspect. We were glad to avoid a meeting between her and Mrs. Jameson, for none of us felt as if we could endure it then.

I suppose the young folks enjoyed the picnic if we did not, and that was the principal thing to be considered, after all. I know that Harry Liscom and Harriet Jameson enjoyed it, and all the more that it was a sort of stolen pleasure. Just before we went home I was strolling off by myself near the brook, and all of a sudden saw the two young things under a willow tree. I stood back softly, and they never knew that I was there, but they were sitting side by side, and Harry's arm was around the girl's waist, and her head was on his shoulder, and they were looking at each other as if they

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saw angels, and I thought to myself that, whether it was due to hygienic bread or pie, they were in love—and what would Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson and Caroline Liscom say?

III

MRS. JAMESON IMPROVES US

It was some time before we really understood that we were to be improved. We might have suspected it from the episode of the hygienic biscuits at the picnic, but we did not. We were not fairly aware of it until the Ladies' Sewing Circle met one afternoon with Mrs. Sim White, the president, the first week in July.

It was a very hot afternoon, and I doubt if we should have had the meeting that day had it not been that we were anxious to get off a barrel as soon as possible to a missionary in Minnesota. The missionary had seven children, the youngest only six weeks old, and they were really suffering. Flora Clark did

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say that if it were as hot in Minnesota as it was in Linnville she would not thank anybody to send her clothes; she would be thankful for the excuse of poverty to go without them. But Mrs. Sim White would not hear to having the meeting put off; she said that a cyclone might come up any minute in Minnesota and cool the air, and then think of all those poor children with nothing to cover them. Flora Clark had the audacity to say that after the cyclone there might not be any children to cover, and a few of the younger members tittered; but we never took Flora's speeches seriously. She always came to the sewing meeting, no matter how much she opposed it, and sewed faster than any of us. She came that afternoon and made three flannel petticoats for three of the children, though she did say that she thought the money would have been better laid out in palm-leaf fans.

We were astonished to see Mrs. H.

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Boardman Jameson come that very hot afternoon, for we knew that she considered herself delicate, and, besides, we wondered that she should feel interested in our sewing circle. Her daughter Harriet came with her; Madam Cobb, as I afterward learned, went, instead, to Mrs. Ketchum's, and stayed all the afternoon, and kept her from going to the meeting at all.

Caroline Liscom came with her boarders, and I knew, the minute I saw her, that something was wrong. She had a look of desperation and defiance which I had seen on her face before. Thinks I to myself: "You are all upset over something, but you have made up your mind to hide it, whether or no."

Mrs. Jameson had a book in her hand, and when she first came in she laid it on the table where we cut out our work. Mrs. Liscom went around the room with her, introducing her to the ladies whom she had not met before. I could see that

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she did not like to do it, and was simply swallowing her objections with hard gulps every time she introduced her.

Harriet walked behind her mother and Mrs. Liscom, and spoke very prettily every time she was addressed.

Harriet Jameson was really an exceedingly pretty girl, with a kind of apologetic sweetness and meekness of manner which won her friends. Her dress that afternoon was pretty, too: a fine white lawn trimmed with very handsome embroidery, and a white satin ribbon at the waist and throat. I understood afterward that Mrs. Jameson did not allow her daughters to wear their best clothes generally to our village festivities, but kept them for occasions in the city, since their fortunes were reduced, thinking that their old finery, though it might be a little the worse for wear, was good enough for our unsophisticated eyes. But that might not have been true; Harriet was very well dressed that afternoon, at all events.

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Mrs. Jameson seemed to be really very affable. She spoke cordially to us all, and then asked to have some work given her; but, as it happened, there was nothing cut out except a black dress for the missionary's wife, and she did not like to strain her eyes working on black.

"Let me cut something out," said she in her brisk manner; "I have come here to be useful. What is there needing to be cut out?"

It was Flora Clark who replied, and I always suspected her of a motive in it, for she had heard about her jumbles by that time. She said there was a little pair of gingham trousers needed for the missionary's five-year-old boy, and Mrs. Jameson, without a quiver of hesitation, asked for the gingham and scissors. I believe she would have undertaken a suit for the missionary with the same alacrity.

Mrs. Jameson was given another little pair of trousers, a size smaller than those

Mrs. Jameson Improves Us

required, for a pattern, a piece of blue and white gingham and the shears, and she began. We all watched her furtively, but she went slashing away with as much confidence as if she had served an apprenticeship with a tailor in her youth. We began to think that possibly she knew better how to cut out trousers than we did. Mrs. White whispered to me that she had heard that many of those rich city women learned how to do everything in case they lost their money, and she thought it was so sensible.

When Mrs. Jameson had finished cutting out the trousers, which was in a very short space of time, she asked for some thread and a needle, and Flora Clark started to get some, and got thereby an excuse to examine the trousers. She looked at them, and held them up so we all could see, and then she spoke.

"Mrs. Jameson," said she, "these are cut just alike back and front, and they are large enough for a boy of twelve."

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She spoke very clearly and decisively. Flora Clark never minces matters.

We fairly shivered with terror as to what would come next, and poor Mrs. White clutched my arm hard. "Oh," she whispered, "I am so sorry she spoke so."

But Mrs. Jameson was not so easily put down. She replied very coolly and sweetly, and apparently without the slightest resentment, that she had made them so on purpose, so that the boy would not outgrow them, and she always thought it better to have the back and front cut alike; the trousers could then be worn either way, and would last much longer.

To our horror, Flora Clark spoke again. "I guess you are right about their lasting," said she; "I shouldn't think those trousers would wear out any faster on a five-year-old boy than they would on a pair of tongs. They certainly won't touch him anywhere."

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Mrs. Jameson only smiled in her calmly superior way at that, and we concluded that she must be good-tempered. As for Flora, she said nothing more, and we all felt much relieved.

Mrs. Jameson went to sewing on the trousers with the same confidence with which she had cut them out; but I must say we had a little more doubt about her skill. She sewed with incredible swiftness; I did not time her exactly, but it did not seem to me that she was more than an hour in making those trousers. I know the meeting began at two o'clock, and it was not more than half-past three when she announced that they were done.

Flora Clark rose, and Mrs. White clutched her skirt and held her back while she whispered something. However, Flora went across the room to the table, and held up the little trousers that we all might see. Mrs. Jameson had done what many a novice in trousers-making does: sewed one leg over the

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other and made a bag of them. They were certainly a comical sight. I don't know whether Flora's sense of humor got the better of her wrath, or whether Mrs. White's expostulation influenced her, but she did not say one word, only stood there holding the trousers, her mouth twitching. As for the rest of us, it was all we could do to keep our faces straight. Mrs. Jameson was looking at her book, and did not seem to notice anything; and Harriet was sitting with her back to Flora, of which I was glad. I should have been sorry to have had the child's feelings hurt.

Flora laid the trousers on the table and came back to her seat without a word, and I know that Mrs. White sat up nearly all night ripping them, and cutting them over, and sewing them together again, in season to have them packed in the barrel the next day.

In the mean time, Mrs. Jameson was finding the place in her book; and just as

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Mrs. Peter Jones had asked Mrs. Butters if it were true that Dora Peckham was going to marry Thomas Wells and had bought her wedding dress, and before Mrs. Butters had a chance to answer her (she lives next door to the Peckhams), she rapped with the scissors on the table.

"Ladies," said she. "Ladies, attention!"

I suppose we all did stiffen up involuntarily; it was so obviously not Mrs. Jameson's place to call us to order and attention. Of course she should have been introduced by our President, who should herself have done the rapping with the scissors. Flora Clark opened her mouth to speak, but Mrs. White clutched her arm and looked at her so beseechingly that she kept quiet.

Mrs. Jameson continued, utterly unconscious of having given any offence. We supposed that she did not once think it possible that we knew what the usages

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of ladies' societies were. "Ladies," said she, "I am sure that you will all prefer having your minds improved and your spheres enlarged by the study and contemplation of one of the greatest authors of any age, to indulging in narrow village gossip. I will now read to you a selection from Robert Browning."

Mrs. Jameson said Robert Browning with such an impressive and triumphantly introductory air that it was almost impossible for a minute not to feel that Browning was actually there in our sewing circle. She made a little pause, too, which seemed to indicate just that. It was borne upon Mrs. White's mind that she ought to clap, and she made a feeble motion with her two motherly hands which one or two of us echoed.

Mrs. Jameson began to read the selection from Robert Browning. Now, as I have said before, we have a literary society in our village, but we have never attempted to read Browning at our meet-

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ings. Some of us read him a little and strive to appreciate him, but we have been quite sure that some other author would interest a larger proportion of the ladies. I don't suppose that more than three of us had ever read or even heard of the selection which Mrs. Jameson read. It was, to my way of thinking, one of the most difficult of them all to be understood by an untrained mind, but we listened politely, and with a semblance, at least, of admiring interest.

I think Harriet Jameson was at first the only seriously disturbed listener, to judge from her expression. The poor child looked so anxious and distressed that I was sorry for her. I heard afterward that she had begged her mother not to take the Browning book, saying that she did not believe the ladies would like it; and Mrs. Jameson had replied that she felt it to be her duty to teach them to like it, and divert their minds from the petty gossip which she had always heard

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was the distinguishing feature of rural sewing meetings.

Mrs. Jameson read and read; when she had finished the first selection she read another. At half-past four o'clock, Mrs. White, who had been casting distressed glances at me, rose and stole out on tiptoe.

I knew why she did so; Mrs. Bemis' hired girl next door was baking her biscuits for her that she need not heat her house up, and she had brought them in. I heard the kitchen door open.

Presently Mrs. White stole in again and tried to listen politely to the reading, but her expression was so strained to maintain interest that one could see the anxiety underneath. I knew what worried her before she told me, as she did presently. "I have rolled those biscuits up in a cloth," she whispered, "but I am dreadfully afraid that they will be spoiled."

Mrs. Jameson began another selection, and I did pity Mrs. White. She whis-



Mrs. Jameson promptly responded as she would have done in her own church,
raising her solitary voice with great emphasis.

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Mrs. Jameson Improves Us

pered to me again that her table was not set, and the biscuits would certainly be spoiled.

The selection which Mrs. Jameson was then reading was a short one, and I saw Mrs. White begin to brighten as she evidently drew near the end. But her joy was of short duration, as Mrs. Jameson began another selection.

However, Mrs. White laid an imploring hand on Flora Clark's arm when she manifested symptoms of rising and interrupting the reading. Flora was getting angry—I knew by the way her forehead was knitted and by the jerky way she sewed. Poor Harriet Jameson looked more and more distressed. I was sure she saw Mrs. White holding back Flora, and knew just what it meant. Harriet was sitting quite idle with her little hands in her lap; we had set her to hemming a ruffle for the missionary's wife's dress, but her stitches were so hopelessly uneven that I had quietly taken it from

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her and told her I was out of work and would do it myself. The poor child had blushed when she gave it up. She evidently knew her deficiencies.

Mrs. Jameson read selections from Robert Browning until six 'oclock, and by that time Mrs. White had attained to the calmness of despair. At a quarter of six she whispered to me that the biscuits were spoiled, and then her face settled into an expression of stony peace. When Mrs. Jameson finally closed her book there was a murmur which might have been considered expressive of relief or applause, according to the amount of self-complacency of the reader. Mrs. Jameson evidently considered it applause, for she bowed in a highly gracious manner, and remarked: "I am very glad if I have given you pleasure, ladies, and I shall be more than pleased at some future time to read some other selections even superior to these which I have given, and also to make some remarks upon them."

Mrs. Jameson Improves Us

There was another murmur, which might have been of pleasure at the prospect of the future reading, or the respite from the present one; I was puzzled to know which it did mean.

We always had our supper at our sewing meetings at precisely five o'clock, and now it was an hour later. Mrs. White rose and went out directly, and Flora Clark and I followed her to assist. We began laying the table as fast as we could, while Mrs. White was cutting the cake. The ladies of the society brought the cake and pie, and Mrs. White furnished the bread and tea. However, that night it was so very warm we had decided to have lemonade instead of tea. Mrs. White had put it to vote among the ladies when they first came, and we had all decided in favor of lemonade. There was another reason for Mrs. White not having tea: she has no dining-room, but eats in her kitchen summer and winter. It is a very large room, but of course in such heat as

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there was that day even a little fire would have made it unendurably warm. So she had planned to have her biscuits baked in Mrs. Bemis' stove and have lemonade.

Our preparations were nearly completed, and we were placing the last things on the table, when my sister-in-law, Louisa Field, came out, and I knew that something was wrong.

"What is the matter?" said I.

Louisa looked at Flora as if she were almost afraid to speak, but finally it came out: Mrs. Jameson must have some hot water to prepare her health food, as she dared not eat our hurtful cake and pie, especially in such heat.

Flora Clark's eyes snapped. She could not be repressed any longer, so she turned on poor Louisa as if she were the offender. "Let her go home, then!" said she. "She sha'n't have any hot water in this house!"

Flora spoke very loud, and Mrs. White was in agony. "Oh, Flora! don't, don't!"

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said she. But she looked at the cold kitchen stove in dismay.

I suggested boiling the kettle on Mrs. Bemis' stove; but that could not be done, for the hired girl had gone away buggy-riding with her beau after she had brought in the biscuits, and Mrs. Bemis was not at the sewing circle: her mother, in the next town, was ill, and she had gone to see her. So the Bemis house was locked up, and the fire no doubt out. Mrs. White lives on an outlying farm, and there was not another neighbor within a quarter of a mile. If Mrs. Jameson must have that hot water for her hygienic food there was really nothing to do but to make up the fire in the kitchen stove, no matter how uncomfortable we all might be in consequence.

Flora Clark said in a very loud voice, and Mrs. White could not hush her, that she would see Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson in Gibraltar first; and she was so indignant because Mrs. White began to put

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kindlings into the stove that she stalked off into the other room. Mrs. White begged me to follow her and try to keep her quiet, but I was so indignant myself that I was almost tempted to wish she would speak out her mind. I ran out and filled the tea-kettle, telling Mrs. White that I guessed Flora wouldn't say anything, and we started the fire.

It was a quarter of seven before the water was hot, and we asked the ladies to walk out to supper. Luckily, the gentlemen were not coming that night. It was haying-time, and we had decided, since we held the meeting principally because of the extra work, that we would not have them. We often think that the younger women don't do as much work when the gentlemen are coming; they are upstairs so long curling their hair and prinking.

I wondered if Flora Clark had said anything. I heard afterward that she had not, but I saw at once that she was

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endeavoring to wreak a little revenge upon Mrs. Jameson. By a series of very skilful and scarcely perceptible manoeuvres she gently impelled Mrs. Jameson, without her being aware of it, into the seat directly in front of the stove. I knew it was not befitting my age and Christian character, but I was glad to see her there. The heat that night was something terrific, and the fire in the stove, although we had made no more than we could help, had increased it decidedly. I thought that Mrs. Jameson, between the stove at her back and the hot water in her health food, would have her just deserts. It did seem as if she must be some degrees warmer than any of the rest of us.

However, who thought to inflict just deserts upon her reckoned without Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson. She began stirring the health food, which she had brought, in her cup of hot water; but suddenly she looked around, saw the stove

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at her back, and sweetly asked Mrs. White if she could not have another seat, as the heat was very apt to affect her head.

It was Harriet, after all, upon whom the punishment for her mother's thoughtlessness fell. She jumped up at once, and eagerly volunteered to change seats with her.

"Indeed, my place is quite cool, mamma," she said. So Mrs. Jameson and her daughter exchanged places; and I did not dare look at Flora Clark.

Though the kitchen was so hot, I think we all felt that we had reason to be thankful that Mrs. Jameson did not beseech us to eat health food as she did at the picnic, and also that the reading was over for that day.

Louisa, when we were going home that night, said she supposed that Mrs. Jameson would try to improve our literary society also; and she was proved to be right in her supposition at the very next

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meeting. Mrs. Jameson came, and she not only read selections from Browning, but she started us in that mad problem of Shakespeare and Bacon. Most of the ladies in our society had not an intimate acquaintance with either, having had, if the truth were told, their minds too fully occupied with such humble domestic questions of identity as whether Johnny or Tommy stole the sugar.

However, when we were once fairly started there was no end to our interest; we all agonized over it, and poor Mrs. Sim White was so exercised over the probable deception of either Bacon or Shakespeare, in any case, that she told me privately that she was tempted to leave the literary society and confine herself to her Bible.

There was actual animosity between some members of our society in consequence. Mrs. Charles Root and Rebecca Snow did not speak to each other for weeks because Mrs. Root believed that

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Shakespeare was Bacon, and Rebecca believed he was himself. Rebecca even stayed away from church and the society on that account.

Mrs. Jameson expressed herself as very much edified at our interest, and said she considered it a proof that our spheres were widening.

Louisa and I agreed that if we could only arrive at a satisfactory conclusion in the matter we should feel that ours were wider; and Flora Clark said it did not seem of much use to her, since Shakespeare and Bacon were both dead and gone, and we were too much concerned with those plays which were written anyhow, and no question about it, to bother about anything else. It did not seem to her that the opinion of our literary society would make much difference to either of them, and that possibly we had better spend our time in studying the plays.

At the second meeting of our society which Mrs. Jameson attended she gave

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us a lecture, which she had written and delivered before her Shakespeare club in the city. It was upon the modern drama, and we thought it must be very instructive, only as few of us ever went to the theatre, or even knew the name of a modern playwright, it was almost like a lecture in an unknown tongue. Mrs. Ketchum went to sleep and snored, and told me on the way home that she did not mean to be ungrateful, but she could not help feeling that it would have been as improving for her to stay at home and read a new Sunday-school book that she was interested in.

Mrs. Jameson did not confine herself in her efforts for our improvement to our diet and our literary tastes. After she had us fairly started in our bewildering career on the tracks of Bacon and Shakespeare—doing a sort of amateur detective work in the tombs, as it were—and after she had induced the storekeeper to lay in a supply of health food—which he finally

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fed to the chickens—she turned her attention to our costumes. She begged us to cut off our gowns at least three inches around the bottoms, for wear when engaged in domestic pursuits, and she tried to induce mothers to take off the shoes and stockings of their small children, and let them run barefoot. Children of a larger growth in our village quite generally go barefoot in the summer, but the little ones are always, as a rule, well shod. Mrs. Jameson said that it was much better for them also to go without shoes and stockings, and Louisa and I were inclined to think she might be right—it does seem to be the natural way of things. But people rather resented her catching their children on the street and stripping off their shoes and stockings, and sending the little things home with them in their hands. However, their mothers put on the shoes and stockings, and thought she must mean well. Very few of them said anything to her by way

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of expostulation; but the children finally ran when they saw her coming, so they would not have their shoes and stockings taken off.

All this time, while Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson was striving to improve us, her daughter Harriet was seemingly devoting all her energies to the improvement of Harry Liscom, or to the improvement of her own ideal in his heart, whichever it may have been; and I think she succeeded in each case.

Neither Mrs. Liscom nor Mrs. Jameson seemed aware of it, but people began to say that Harry Liscom and the eldest Jameson girl were going together.

I had no doubt of it after what I had seen in the grove; and one evening during the last of July I had additional evidence. In the cool of the day I strolled down the road a little way, and finally stopped at the old Wray house. Nobody lived there then; it had been shut up for many a year. I thought I would sit down on the

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old doorstep and rest, and I had barely settled myself when I heard voices. They came around the corner from the south piazza, and I could not help hearing what they said, though I rose and went away as soon as I had my wits about me and fairly knew that I was eavesdropping.

"You are so far above me," said a boy's voice which I knew was Harry Liscom's.

Then came the voice of the girl in reply: "Oh, Harry, it is you who are so far above me." Then I was sure that they kissed each other.

I reflected as I stole softly away, lest they should discover me and be ashamed, that, after all, it was only love which could set people upon immeasurable heights in each other's eyes, and stimulate them to real improvement and to live up to each other's ideals.

IV

THEY TAKE A FARM

I HAD wondered a little, after Mrs. Jameson's frantic appeal to me to secure another boarding-place for her, that she seemed to settle down so contentedly at Caroline Liscom's. She said nothing more about her dissatisfaction, if she felt any. However, I fancy that Mrs. Jameson is one to always conceal her distaste for the inevitable, and she must have known that she could not have secured another boarding-place in Linnville. As for Caroline Liscom, her mouth is always closed upon her own affairs until they have become matters of history. She never said a word to me about the Jamesons until they had ceased to be her boarders, which was during the first week

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in August. My sister-in-law, Louisa Field, came home one afternoon with the news. She had been over to Mrs. Gregg's to get her receipt for blackberry jam, and had heard it there. Mrs. Gregg always knew about the happenings in our village before they fairly gathered form on the horizon of reality.

"What do you think, Sophia?" said Louisa when she came in—she did not wait to take off her hat before she began—"the Jamesons are going to leave the Liscoms, and they have rented the old Wray place, and are going to run the farm and raise vegetables and eggs. Mr. Jameson is coming on Saturday night, and they are going to move in next Monday."

I was very much astonished; I had never dreamed that the Jamesons had any taste for farming, and then, too, it was so late in the season.

"Old Jonas Martin is planting the garden now," said Louisa. "I saw him as I came past."

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"The garden," said I; "why, it is the first of August!"

"Mrs. Jameson thinks that she can raise late peas and corn, and set hens so as to have spring chickens very early in the season," replied Louisa, laughing; "at least, that is what Mrs. Gregg says. The Jamesons are going to stay here until the last of October, and then Jonas Martin is going to take care of the hens through the winter."

I remembered with a bewildered feeling what Mrs. Jameson had said about not wanting to board with people who kept hens, and here she was going to keep them herself.

Louisa and I wondered what kind of a man Mr. H. Boardman Jameson might be; he had never been to Linnville, being kept in the city by his duties at the custom-house.

"I don't believe that he will have much to say about the farm while Mrs. Jameson has a tongue in her head," said Louisa; and I agreed with her.

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When we saw Mr. H. Boardman Jameson at church the next Sunday we were confirmed in our opinion.

He was a small man, much smaller than his wife, with a certain air of defunct style about him. He had quite a fierce bristle of moustache, and a nervous briskness of carriage, yet there was something that was unmistakably conciliatory and subservient in his bearing toward Mrs. Jameson. He stood aside for her to enter the pew, with the attitude of vassalage; he seemed to respond with an echo of deference to every rustle of her silken skirts and every heave of her wide shoulders. Mrs. Jameson was an Episcopalian, and our church is Congregational. Mrs. Jameson did not attempt to kneel when she entered, but bent her head forward upon the back of the pew in front of her. Mr. Jameson waited until she was fairly in position, with observant and anxious eyes upon her, before he did likewise.

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This was really the first Sunday on which Mrs. Jameson herself had appeared at church. Ever since she had been in our village the Sundays had been exceptionally warm, or else rainy and disagreeable, and of course Mrs. Jameson was in delicate health. The girls and Cobb had attended faithfully, and always sat in the pew with the Liscoms. To-day Harry and his father sat in the Jones pew to make room for the two elder Jamesons.

There was an unusual number at meeting that morning, partly, no doubt, because it had been reported that Mr. Jameson was to be there, and that made a little mistake of his and his wife's more conspicuous. The minister read that morning the twenty-third Psalm, and after he had finished the first verse Mrs. Jameson promptly responded with the second, as she would have done in her own church, raising her solitary voice with great emphasis. It would not have

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been so ludicrous had not poor Mr. Jameson, evidently seeing the mistake, and his face blazing, yet afraid to desert his wife's standard, followed her dutifully just a few words in the rear. While Mrs. Jameson was beside the still waters, Mr. Jameson was in the green pastures, and so on. I pitied the Jameson girls. Harriet looked ready to cry with mortification, and Sarah looked so alarmed that I did not know but she would run out of the church. As for Cobb, he kept staring at his mother, and opening his mouth to speak, and swallowing and never saying anything, until it seemed as if he might go into convulsions. People tried not to laugh, but a little repressed titter ran over the congregation, and the minister's voice shook. Mrs. Jameson was the only one who did not appear in the least disturbed; she did not seem to realize that she had done anything unusual.

Caroline Liscom was not at church—indeed, she had not been much since the

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boarders arrived ; she had to stay at home to get the dinner. Louisa and I wondered whether she was relieved or disturbed at losing her boarders, and whether we should ever know which. When we passed the Wray house on our way home, and saw the blinds open, and the fresh mould in the garden, and the new shingles shining on the hen-house roof, we speculated about it.

"Caroline had them about nine weeks, and at fifteen dollars a week she will have one hundred and thirty-five dollars," said Louisa. "That will buy her something extra."

"I know that she has been wanting some portières for her parlor, and a new set for her spare chamber, and maybe that is what she will get," said I. And I said furthermore that I hoped she would feel paid for her hard work and the strain it must have been on her mind.

Louisa and I are not very curious, but the next day we did watch — though

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rather furtively—the Jamesons moving into the old Wray house.

All day we saw loads of furniture passing, which must have been bought in Grover. So many of the things were sewed up in burlap that we could not tell much about them, which was rather unfortunate. It was partly on this account that we did not discourage Tommy Gregg—who had been hanging, presumably with his mother's connivance, around the old Wray house all day—from reporting to us as we were sitting on the front doorstep in the twilight. Mrs. Peter Jones and Amelia Powers had run over, and were sitting there with Louisa and me. Little Alice had gone to bed; we had refused to allow her to go to see what was going on, and yet listened to Tommy Gregg's report, which was not, I suppose, to our credit. I have often thought that punctilious people will use cats'-paws to gratify curiosity when they would scorn to use them for anything else. Still,

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neither Louisa nor I would have actually beckoned Tommy Gregg up to the door, as Mrs. Jones did, though I suppose we had as much cause to be ashamed, for we certainly listened full as greedily as she.

It seemed to me that Tommy had seen all the furniture unpacked, and much of it set up, by lurking around in the silent, shrinking, bright-eyed fashion that he has. Tommy Gregg is so single-minded in his investigations that I can easily imagine that he might seem as impersonal as an observant ray of sunlight in the window. Anyway, he had evidently seen everything, and nobody had tried to stop him.

"It ain't very handsome," said Tommy Gregg with a kind of disappointment and wonder. "There ain't no carpets in the house except in Grandma Cobb's room, and that's jest straw mattin'; and there's some plain mats without no roses on 'em; and there ain't no stove 'cept in the kitchen; jest old andirons like mother

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keeps up garret; and there ain't no stuffed furniture at all; and they was eatin' supper without no table-cloth."

Amelia Powers and Mrs. Jones thought that it was very singular that the Jamesons had no stuffed furniture, but Louisa and I did not feel so. We had often wished that we could afford to change the haircloth furniture, which I had had when I was married, for some pretty rattan or plain wood chairs. Louisa and I rather fancied the Jamesons' style of house-furnishing when we called there. It was rather odd, certainly, from our village standpoint, and we were not accustomed to see bare floors if people could possibly buy a carpet; the floors were pretty rough in the old house, too. It did look as if some of the furniture was sliding down-hill, and it was quite a steep descent from the windows to the chimney in all the rooms. Of course, a carpet would have taken off something of that effect. Another thing struck us as

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odd, and really scandalized the village at large: the Jamesons had taken down every closet and cupboard door in the house. They had hung curtains before the clothes-closets, but the shelves of the pantry which opened out of the dining-room, and the china-closet in the parlor, were quite exposed, and furnished with, to us, a very queer assortment of dishes. The Jamesons had not one complete set, and very few pieces alike. They had simply ransacked the neighborhood for forsaken bits of crockery-ware, the remnants of old wedding-sets which had been long stored away on top shelves, or used for baking or preserving purposes.

I remember Mrs. Gregg laughing, and saying that the Jamesons were tickled to death to get some old blue cups which she had when she was married and did not pay much for then, and had used for fifteen years to put up her currant jelly in; and had paid her enough money for them to make up the amount which she

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had been trying to earn, by selling eggs, to buy a beautiful new tea-set of a brown-and-white ware. I don't think the Jamesons paid much for any of the dishes which they bought in our village; we are not very shrewd people, and it did not seem right to ask large prices for articles which had been put to such menial uses. I think many things were given them. I myself gave Harriet Jameson an old blue plate and another brown one which I had been using to bake extra pies in when my regular pie-plates gave out. They were very discolored and cracked, but I never saw anybody more pleased than Harriet was.

I suppose the special feature of the Jamesons' household adornments which roused the most comment in the village was the bean-pots. The Jamesons, who did not like baked beans and never cooked them, had bought, or had given them, a number of old bean-pots, and had them sitting about the floor and on the tables

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with wild flowers in them. People could not believe that at first; they thought they must be some strange kind of vase which they had had sent from New York. They cast sidelong glances of sharpest scrutiny at them when they called. When they discovered that they were actually bean-pots, and not only that, but were sitting on the floor, which had never been considered a proper place for bean-pots in any capacity, they were really surprised. Flora Clark said that for her part her bean-pot went into the oven with beans in it, instead of into the corner with flowers in it, as long as she had her reason. But I must say I did not quite agree with her. I have only one bean-pot, and we eat beans, therefore mine has to be kept sacred to its original mission; and I must say that I thought Mrs. Jameson's with goldenrod in it really looked better than mine with beans. I told Louisa that I could not see why the original states of inanimate things ought to be remembered

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against them when they were elevated to finer uses any more than those of people, and now that the bean-pot had become a vase in a parlor why its past could not be forgotten. Louisa agreed with me, but I don't doubt that many people never looked at those pots full of goldenrod without seeing beans. It was to my way of thinking more their misfortune than the Jamesons' mistake; and they made enough mistakes which were not to be questioned not to have the benefit of any doubt.

Soon the Jamesons, with their farm, were the standing joke in our village. I had never known there was such a strong sense of humor among us as their proceedings awakened. Mr. H. Boardman Jameson did not remain in Fairville long, as he had to return to his duties at the custom-house. Mrs. Jameson, who seemed to rouse herself suddenly from the languid state which she had assumed at times, managed the farm. She cer-

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tainly had original ideas and the courage of her convictions.

She stopped at nothing; even Nature herself she had a try at, like some mettlesome horse which does not like to be balked by anything in the shape of a wall.

Old Jonas Martin was a talker, and he talked freely about the people for whom he worked. "Old Deacon Sears had a cow once that would jump everything. Wa'n't a wall could be built that was high enough to stop her," he would say. "'Tain't no ways clear to my mind that she ain't the identical critter that jumped the moon;—and I swan if Mis' Jameson ain't like her. There ain't nothin' that's goin' to stop her; she ain't goin' to be hendered by any sech little things as times an' seasons an' frost from raisin' corn an' green peas an' flowers in her garden. 'The frost'll be a-nippin' of 'em, marm,' says I, 'as soon as they come up, marm.' 'I wish you to leave that to me,

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my good man,' says she. Law, she ain't a-goin' to hev any frost a-nippin' her garden unless she's ready for it. And as for the chickens, I wouldn't like to be in their shoes unless they hatch when Mis' Jameson she wants 'em to. They have to do everything else she wants 'em to, and I dunno but they'll come to time on that. They're the fust fowls I ever see that a woman could stop scratchin'."

With that, old Jonas Martin would pause for a long cackle of mirth, and his auditor would usually join him, for Mrs. Jameson's hens were enough to awaken merriment, and no mistake. Louisa and I could never see them without laughing enough to cry; and as for little Alice, who, like most gentle, delicate children, was not often provoked to immoderate laughter, she almost went into hysterics. We rather dreaded to have her catch sight of the Jameson hens. There were twenty of them, great, fat Plymouth Rocks, and every one of them in shoes,

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which were made of pieces of thick cloth sewed into little bags and tied firmly around the legs of the fowls, and they were effectually prevented thereby from scratching up the garden seeds. The gingerly and hesitating way in which these hens stepped around the Jameson premises was very funny. It was quite a task for old Jonas Martin to keep the hens properly shod, for the cloth buskins had to be often renewed; and distressed squawkings amid loud volleys of aged laughter indicated to us every day what was going on.

The Jamesons kept two Jersey cows, and Mrs. Jameson caused their horns to be wound with strips of cloth terminating in large, soft balls of the same, to prevent their hooking. When the Jamesons first began farming, their difficulty in suiting themselves with cows occasioned much surprise. They had their pick of a number of fine ones, but invariably took them on trial, and promptly returned them

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with the message that they were not satisfactory. Old Jonas always took back the cows, and it is a question whether or not he knew what the trouble was, and was prolonging the situation for his own enjoyment.

At last it came out. Old Jonas came leading back two fine Jerseys to Sim White's, and he said, with a great chuckle: "Want to know what ails these ere critters, Sim? Well, I'll tell ye: they ain't got no upper teeth. The Jamesons ain't goin' to git took in with no cows without no teeth in their upper jaws, you bet."

That went the rounds of the village. Mrs. White was so sorry for the Jamesons in their dilemma of ignorance of our rural wisdom that she begged Sim to go over and persuade them that cows were created without teeth in their upper jaw, and that the cheating, if cheating there were, was done by Nature, and all men alike were victimized. I suppose Mr. White must have convinced her, for they

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bought the cows; but it must have been a sore struggle for Mrs. Jameson at least to swallow instruction, for she had the confidence of an old farmer in all matters pertaining to a farm.

She, however, did listen readily to one singular piece of information which brought much ridicule upon them. She chanced to say to Wilson Gregg, who is something of a wag, and had just sold the Jamesons a nice little white pig, that she thought that ham was very nice in alternate streaks of fat and lean, though she never ate it herself, and only bought the pig for the sake of her mother, who had old-fashioned tastes in her eating and would have pork, and she thought that home-raised would be so much healthier.

"Why, bless you, ma'am," said he, "if you want your ham streaky all you have to do is to feed the pig one day and starve him the next."

The Jamesons tried this ingenious plan; then, luckily for the pig, old Jonas, who

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had chuckled over it for a while, revealed the fraud and put him on regular rations.

I suppose the performance of the Jamesons which amused the village the most was setting their hens on hard-boiled eggs for sanitary reasons. That seemed incredible to me at first, but we had it on good authority—that of Hannah Bell, a farmer's daughter from the West Corners, who worked for the Jamesons. She declared that she told Mrs. Jameson that hens could not set to any purpose on boiled eggs; but Mrs. Jameson had said firmly that they must set upon them or none at all; that she would not have eggs about the premises so long otherwise; she did not consider it sanitary. Finally, when the eggs would not hatch submitted to such treatment, even at her command, she was forced to abandon her position, though even then with conditions of her surrender to Nature. She caused the nests to be well soaked with disinfectants.

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The Jamesons shut the house up the last of October and went back to the city, and I think most of us were sorry. I was, and Louisa said that she missed them.

Mrs. Jameson had not been what we call neighborly through the summer, when she lived in the next house. Indeed, I think she never went into any of the village houses in quite a friendly and equal way, as we visit one another. Generally she came either with a view toward improving us—on an errand of mercy as it were, which some resented—or else upon some matter of business. Still we had, after all, a kindly feeling for her, and especially for Grandma Cobb and the girls, and the little meek boy. Grandma Cobb had certainly visited us, and none of us were clever enough to find out whether it was with a patronizing spirit or not. The extreme freedom which she took with our houses, almost seeming to consider them as her own,

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living in them some days from dawn till late at night, might have indicated either patronage or the utmost democracy. We missed her auburn-wigged head appearing in our doorways at all hours, and there was a feeling all over the village as if company had gone home.

I missed Harriet more than any of them. During the last of the time she had stolen in to see me quite frequently when she was released from her mother's guardianship for a minute. None of our village girls were kept as close as the Jamesons. Louisa and I used to wonder whether Mrs. Jameson kept any closer ward because of Harry Liscom. He certainly never went to the Jameson house. We knew that either Mrs. Jameson had prohibited it, or his own mother. We thought it must be Mrs. Jameson, for Harry had a will of his own, as well as his mother, and was hardly the man to yield to her in a matter of this kind without a struggle.

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Though Harry did not go to the Jameson house, I, for one, used to see two suspicious-looking figures steal past the house in the summer evenings; but I said nothing. There was a little grove on the north side of our house, and there was a bench under the trees. Often I used to see a white flutter out there of a moonlight evening, and I knew that Harriet Jameson had a little white cloak. Louisa saw it too, but we said nothing, though we more than suspected that Harriet must steal out of the house after her mother had gone to her room, which we knew was early. Hannah Bell must know if that were the case, but she kept their secret.

Louisa and I speculated as to what was our duty if we were witnessing clandestine meetings, but we could never bring our minds to say anything.

The night before the Jamesons left it was moonlight and there was a hard frost, and I saw those young things stealing

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down the road for their last stolen meeting, and I pitied them. I was afraid, too, that Harriet would take cold in the sharp air. I thought she had on a thin cloak. Then I did something which I never quite knew whether to blame myself for or not. It did seem to me that, if the girl were a daughter of mine, and would in any case have a clandestine meeting with her lover, I should prefer it to be in a warm house rather than in a grove on a frosty night. So I caught a shawl from the table, and ran out to the front door, and called.

"Harry!" said I, "is that you?" They started, and I suppose poor Harriet was horribly frightened; but I tried to speak naturally, and as if the two being there together were quite a matter of course.

"I wonder if it will be too much for me to ask of you," said I, when Harry had responded quite boldly with a "Good-evening, Aunt Sophia"—he used to call me Aunt when he was a child, and still

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kept it up—"I wonder if it will be too much to ask if you two will just step in here a minute while I run down to Mrs. Jones'? I want to get a pattern to use the first thing in the morning. Louisa has gone to meeting, and I don't like to leave Alice alone."

They said they would be glad to come in, though, of course, with not as much joy as they felt later, when they saw that I meant to leave them to themselves for a time.

I stayed at Mrs. Jones' until I knew that Louisa would be home if I waited any longer, and I thought, besides, that the young people had been alone long enough. Then I went home. I suppose that they were sorry to see me so soon, but they looked up at me very gratefully when I bade them good-night and thanked them. I said quite meaningly that it was a cold night and there would be a frost, and Harriet must be careful and not take cold. I thought that would be

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enough for Harry Liscom, unless being in love had altered him and made him selfish. I did not think he would keep his sweetheart out, even if it were his last chance of seeing her alone for so long, if he thought she would get any harm by it, especially after he had visited her for a reasonable length of time.

I was right in my opinion. They did not turn about directly and go home—I did not expect that, of course—but they walked only to the turn of the road the other way; then I saw them pass the house, and presently poor Harry returned alone.

I did pity Harry Liscom when I met him on the street a few days after the Jamesons had left. I guessed at once that he was missing his sweetheart sorely, and had not yet had a letter from her. He looked pale and downcast, though he smiled as he lifted his hat to me, but he colored a little as if he suspected that I might guess his secret.

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I met him the next day, and his face was completely changed, all radiant and glowing with the veritable light of youthful hope upon it. He bowed to me with such a flash of joy in his smile that I felt quite warmed by it, though it was none of mine. I thought, though I said nothing, "Harry Liscom, you have had a letter."

V

THEIR SECOND SUMMER

THE Jamesons returned to Linnville the first of June. For some weeks we had seen indications of their coming. All through April and May repairs and improvements had been going on in their house. Some time during the winter the Jamesons had purchased the old Wray place, and we felt that they were to be a permanent feature in our midst.

The old Wray house had always been painted white, with green blinds, as were most of our village houses; now it was painted red, with blinds of a darker shade. When Louisa and I saw its bright walls through the budding trees we were somewhat surprised, but thought it might look rather pretty when we became accustomed

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to it. Very few of the neighbors agreed with us, however; they had been so used to seeing the walls of their dwellings white that this startled them almost as much as a change of color in their own faces would have done.

"We might as well set up for red Injuns and done with it," said Mrs. Gregg one afternoon at the sewing circle. "What anybody can want anything any prettier than a neat white house with green blinds for, is beyond me."

Every month during the winter a letter had come to our literary society in care of the secretary, who was my sister-in-law, Louisa Field. Louisa was always secretary because she was a school-teacher and was thought to have her hand in at that sort of work. Mrs. Jameson wrote a very kind, if it was a somewhat patronizing, sort of letter. She extended to us her very best wishes for our improvement and the widening of our spheres, and made numerous suggestions

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which she judged calculated to advance us in those respects. She recommended selections from Robert Browning to be read at our meetings, and she sent us some copies of explanatory and critical essays to be used in connection with them. She also in March sent us a copy of another lecture about the modern drama which she had herself written and delivered before her current literature club. With that she sent us some works of Ibsen and the Belgian writer, Maeterlinck, with the recommendation that we devote ourselves to the study of them at once, they being eminently calculated for the widening of our spheres.

Flora Clark, who is the president of the society; Mrs. Peter Jones, who is the vice-president; Louisa, and I, who am the treasurer, though there is nothing whatever to treasure, held a council over the books. We all agreed that while we were interested in them ourselves, though they were a strange savor to our mental

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palates, yet we would not read Mrs. Jameson's letter concerning them to the society, nor advise the study of them.

"I, for one, don't like to take the responsibility of giving the women of this village such reading," said Flora Clark. "It may be improving and widening, and it certainly is interesting, and there are fine things in it, but it does not seem to me that it would be wise to take it into the society when I consider some of the members. I would just as soon think of asking them to tea and giving them nothing but olives and Russian caviare, which, I understand, hardly anybody likes at first. I never tasted them myself. We know what the favorite diet of this village is; and as long as we can eat it ourselves it seems to me it is safer than to try something which we may like and everybody else starve on, and I guess we haven't exhausted some of the older, simpler things, and that there is some nourishment to be gotten out of them yet for

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all of us. It is better for us all to eat bread and butter and pie than for two or three of us to eat the olives and caviare, and the rest to have to sit gnawing their forks and spoons."

Mrs. Peter Jones, who is sometimes thought of for the president instead of Flora, bridled a little. "I suppose you think that these books are above the ladies of this village," said she.

"I don't know as I think they are so much above as too far to one side," said Flora. "Sometimes it's longitude, and sometimes it's latitude that separates people. I don't know but we are just as far from Ibsen and Maeterlinck as they are from us."

Louisa and I thought Flora might be right. At all events, we did not wish to set ourselves up in opposition to her. We never carried the books into the society, and we never read Mrs. Jameson's letter about them, though we did feel somewhat guilty, especially as we reflected

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that Flora had never forgotten the affair of the jumbles, and might possibly have allowed her personal feelings to influence her.

"I should feel very sorry," said Louisa to me, "if we were preventing the women of this village from improving themselves."

"Well, we can wait until next summer, and let Mrs. Jameson take the responsibility. I don't want to be the means of breaking up the society, for one," said I.

However, when Mrs. Jameson finally arrived in June, she seemed to be on a slightly different tack, so to speak, of improvement. She was not so active in our literary society and our sewing circle as she had been the summer before, but now, her own sphere having possibly enlarged, she had designs upon the village in the abstract.

Hannah Bell came over from the West Corners to open the house for them, and at five o'clock we saw the Grover stage

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rattle past with their trunks on top, and Grandma Cobb and the girls and Cobb looking out of the windows. Mrs. Jameson, being delicate, was, of course, leaning back, exhausted with her journey. Jonas Martin, who had been planting the garden, was out at the gate of the Wray house to help the driver carry in the trunks, and Hannah Bell was there too.

Louisa and I had said that it seemed almost too bad not to have some one of the village women go there and welcome them, but we did not know how Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson might take it, and nobody dared go. Mrs. White said that she would have been glad to make some of her cream biscuits and send them over, but she knew that Mrs. Jameson would not eat them, of course, and she did not know whether she would like any of the others to, and might think it a liberty.

So nobody did anything but watch. It was not an hour after the stage coach arrived before we saw Grandma Cobb com-

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ing up the road. We did not know whether she was going to Amelia Powers', or Mrs. Jones', or to our house; but she turned in at our gate.

We went to the door to meet her, and I must say she did seem glad to see us, and we were glad to see her. In a very short time we knew all that had happened in the Jameson family since they had left Linnville, and with no urging, and with even some reluctance on our part. It did not seem quite right for us to know how much Mrs. Jameson had paid her dress-maker for making her purple satin, and still less so for us to know that she had not paid for the making of her black lace net and the girls' organdy muslins, though she had been dunned three times. The knowledge was also forced upon us that all these fine new clothes were left in New York, since the shabby old ones must be worn out in the country, and that Harriet had cried because she could not bring some of her pretty gowns with her.

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"Her mother does not think that there is any chance of her making a match here, and she had better save them up till next winter. Dress does make so much difference in a girl's prospects, you know," said Grandma Cobb shrewdly.

I thought of poor Harry Liscom, and how sorry his little sweetheart must have felt not to be able to show herself in her pretty dresses to him. However, I was exceedingly glad to hear that she had cried, because it argued well for Harry, and looked as if she had not found another lover more to her mind in New York.

Indeed, Grandma Cobb informed us presently as to that. "Harriet does not seem to find anybody," said she. "I suppose it is because H. Boardman lost his money; young men are so careful nowadays."

Grandma Cobb stayed to tea with us that night; our supper hour came, and of course we asked her.

Grandma Cobb owned with the greatest frankness that she should like to stay.

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"There isn't a thing to eat at our house but hygienic biscuits and eggs," said she. "My daughter wrote Hannah not to cook anything until we came; Hannah would have made some cake and pie, otherwise. I tell my daughter I have got so far along in life without living on hygienic food, and I am not going to begin. I want to get a little comfort out of the taste of my victuals, and my digestion is as good as hers, in spite of all her fussing. For my part," continued Grandma Cobb, who had at times an almost coarsely humorous method of expressing herself, "I believe in not having your mind on your inwards any more than you can possibly help. I believe the best way to get along with them is to act as if they weren't there."

After Grandma Cobb went home, as late as nine o'clock, I saw a clinging, shadowy couple stroll past our house, and knew it was Harriet Jameson and Harry, as did Louisa, and our consciences began to trouble us again.

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"I feel like a traitor to Caroline and to Mrs. Jameson sometimes," said I.

"Well, maybe that is better than to be traitor to true love," said Louisa, which did sound rather sentimental.

The next morning about eleven o'clock Mrs. Jameson came in, and we knew at once that she was, so to speak, fairly rampant in the field of improvement for our good, or rather the good of the village, for, as I said before, she was now resolved upon the welfare of the village at large, and not that of individuals or even societies.

"I consider that my own sphere has been widened this winter," said Mrs. Jameson, and Louisa and I regarded her with something like terror. Flora Clark said, when she heard that remark of Mrs. Jameson's, that she felt, for her part, as if a kicking horse had got out of the pasture, and there was no knowing where he would stop.

We supposed that it must be an evi-

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dence of Mrs. Jameson's own advance in improvement that she had adopted such a singular costume, according to our ideas. She was dressed no longer in the rich fabrics which had always aroused our admiration, but, instead, wore a gown of brown cloth cut short enough to expose her ankles, which were, however, covered with brown gaiters made of cloth like her dress. She wore a shirt-waist of brown silk, and a little cutaway jacket. Mrs. Jameson looked as if she were attired for riding the wheel, but that was a form of exercise to which she was by no means partial either for herself or for her daughters. I could never understand just why she was not partial to wheeling. Wheels were not as fashionable then as now, but Mrs. Jameson was always quite up with, if not in advance of, her age.

Neither of us admired her in this costume. Mrs. Jameson was very stout, and the short skirt was not, to our way of thinking, becoming.

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"Don't you think that I have adopted a very sensible and becoming dress for country wear?" said she, and Louisa and I did not know what to say. We did not wish to be untruthful and we disliked to be impolite. Finally, Louisa said faintly that she thought it must be very convenient for wear in muddy weather, and I echoed her.

"Of course, you don't have to hold it up at all," said I.

"It is the only costume for wear in the country," said Mrs. Jameson, "and I hope to have all the women in Linnville wearing it before the summer is over."

Louisa and I glanced at each other in dismay. I think that we both had mental pictures of some of the women whom we knew in that costume. Some of our good, motherly, village faces, with their expressions of homely dignity and Christian decorousness, looking at us from under that jaunty English walking-hat, in lieu of their sober bonnets, presented them-

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selves to our imaginations, and filled us with amusement and consternation.

"Only think how Mrs. Sim White would look," Louisa said after Mrs. Jameson had gone, and we both saw Mrs. White going down the street in that costume indicative of youthful tramps over long stretches of road, and mad spins on wheels, instead of her nice, softly falling black cashmere skirts covering decently her snowy stockings and her cloth congress boots; and we shuddered.

"Of course, she would have to wear gaiters like Mrs. Jameson," said Louisa, "but it would be dreadful."

"Well, there's one comfort," said I; "Mrs. White will never wear it."

"Nor anybody else," said Louisa.

Still we did feel a little nervous about it; there is never any estimating the influence of a reformer. However, we were sure of ourselves. Louisa and I agreed that we never would be seen out in any such costume. Not very many in the

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village were. There were a few women, who were under the influence of Mrs. Jameson, who did cut off some of their old dresses and make themselves some leggings with hers for a pattern. After their housework was done they started off for long tramps with strides of independence and defiance, but they did not keep it up very long; none of them after Mrs. Jameson went away. To tell the truth, most of the women in our village had so much work to do, since they kept no servants, that they could not take many ten-mile walks, no matter what length skirts they wore. However, many wore the short ones while doing housework, which was very sensible.

During that morning call, Mrs. Jameson, besides the reformed costume, advocated another innovation which fairly took our breaths away. She was going to beautify the village. We had always considered the village beautiful as it was, and we bridled a little at that.

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"There is scarcely a house in this village which is overgrown with vines," said she. "I am going to introduce vines."

Louisa ventured to say that she thought vines very pretty, but she knew some people objected to them on the score of spiders, and also thought that they were bad for the paint. We poor, frugal village folk have always to consider whether beauty will trespass on utility, and consequently dollars and cents. There are many innocent slaves to Mammon in our midst.

Mrs. Jameson sniffed in her intensely scornful way. "Spiders and paint!" said she. "I am going to have the houses of this village vine-clad. It is time that the people were educated in beauty."

"People won't like it if she does go to planting vines around their houses without their permission, even if she does mean well," said Louisa after she had gone.

"She never will dare to without their

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permission," said I; but I wondered while I spoke, and Louisa laughed.

"Don't you be too sure of that," said she—and she was right.

Permission in a few cases Mrs. Jameson asked, and in the rest she assumed. Old Jonas Martin ransacked the woods for vines—clematis and woodbine—then he, with Mrs. Jameson to superintend, set them out around our village houses. The calm insolence of benevolence with which Mrs. Jameson did this was inimitable. People actually did not know whether to be furious or amused at this liberty taken with their property. They saw with wonder Mrs. Jameson, with old Jonas following laden with vines and shovel, also the girls and Cobb, who had been pressed, however unwillingly, into service, tagging behind trailing with woodbine and clematis; they stood by and saw their house-banks dug up and the vines set, and in most cases said never a word. If they did expostulate, Mrs. Jameson only

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directed Jonas where to put the next vine, and assured the bewildered owner of the premises that he would in time thank her.

However, old Jonas often took the irate individual aside for a consolatory word. "Lord a-massy, don't ye worry," old Jonas would say, with a sly grin; "ye know well enough that there won't a blamed one of the things take root without no sun an' manure; might as well humor her long as she's sot on 't."

Then old Jonas would wink slowly with a wink of ineffable humor. There was no mistaking the fact that old Jonas was getting a deal of solid enjoyment out of the situation. He had had a steady, hard grind of existence, and was for the first time seeing the point of some of those jokes of life for which his natural temperament had given him a relish. He acquired in those days a quizzical cock to his right eyebrow, and a comically confidential quirk to his mouth, which were in themselves enough to provoke a laugh.

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Mrs. Jameson, however, did not confine herself, in her efforts for the wholesale decoration of our village, to the planting of vines around our house-walls; and there were, in one or two cases, serious consequences.

When, thinking that corn-cockles and ox-eyed daisies would be a charming combination at the sides of the country road, she caused them to be sowed, and thereby introduced them into Jonas Green's wheat-field, he expostulated in forcible terms, and threatened a suit for damages; and when she caused a small grove of promising young hemlocks to be removed from Eben Betts' woodland and set out in the sandy lot in which the schoolhouse stands, without leave or license, it was generally conceded that she had exceeded her privileges as a public benefactress.

I said at once there would be trouble, when Louisa came home and told me about it.

"The schoolhouse looks as if it were set

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in a shady grove," said she, "and is ever so pretty. The worst of it is, of course, the trees won't grow in that sand-hill."

"The worst of it is, if she has taken those trees without leave or license, as I suspect, Eben Betts will not take it as a joke," said I; and I was right.

Mr. H. Boardman Jameson had to pay a goodly sum to Eben Betts to hush the matter up; and the trees soon withered, and were cut up for firewood for the schoolhouse. People blamed old Jonas Martin somewhat for his share of this transaction, arguing that he ought not to have yielded to Mrs. Jameson in such a dishonest transaction, even in the name of philanthropy; but he defended himself, saying: "It's easy 'nough to talk, but I'd like to see any of ye stand up agin that woman. When she gits headed, it's either git out from under foot or git knocked over."

Mrs. Jameson not only strove to establish improvements in our midst, but she

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attacked some of our time-honored institutions, one against which she directed all the force of her benevolent will being our front doors. Louisa and I had always made free with our front door, as had some others; but, generally speaking, people in our village used their front doors only for weddings, funerals, and parties. The side doors were thought to be good enough for ordinary occasions, and we never dreamed, when dropping in for a neighborly call, of approaching any other. Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson resolved to do away with this state of things, and also with our sacred estimate of the best parlors, which were scarcely opened from one year's end to the other, and seemed redolent of past grief and joy, with no dilution by the every-day occurrences of life. Mrs. Jameson completely ignored the side door, marched boldly upon the front one, and compelled the mistress to open it to her resolute knocks. Once inside, she advanced straight upon the sacred pre-

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cinets of the best parlor, and seated herself in the chilly, best rocking-chair with the air of one who usurps a throne, asking with her manner of sweet authority if the blinds could not be opened and the sun let in, as it felt damp to her, and she was very susceptible to dampness. It was told, on good authority, that in some cases she even threw open the blinds and windows herself while the person who admitted her was calling other members of the family.

It was also reported that she had on several occasions marched straight up to a house which she had no design of entering, thrown open the parlor blinds, and admitted the sunlight, with its fading influence, on the best carpet, and then proceeded down the street with the bearing of triumphant virtue. It was related that in a number of instances the indignant housewife, on entering her best parlor, found that the sun had been streaming in there all day, right on the carpet.

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Mrs. Jameson also waged fierce war on another custom dear to the average village heart, and held sacred, as everything should be which is innocently dear to one's kind, by all who did not exactly approve of it.

In many of our village parlors, sometimes in the guest-chambers, when there had been many deaths in the family, hung the framed coffin-plates and faded funeral wreaths of departed dear ones. Now and then there was a wreath of wool flowers, a triumph of domestic art, which encircled the coffin-plate instead of the original funeral garland. Mrs. Jameson set herself to work to abolish this grimly pathetic New England custom with all her might. She did everything but actually tear them from our walls. That, even in her fiery zeal of improvement, she did not quite dare attempt. She made them a constant theme of conversation at sewing circle and during her neighborly calls. She spoke of the custom quite openly as grew-

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some and barbarous, but I must say without much effect. Mrs. Jameson found certain strongholds of long-established customs among us which were impregnable to open rancor or ridicule—and that was one of them. The coffin-plates and the funeral wreaths continued to hang in the parlors and chambers.

Once Flora Clark told Mrs. Jameson to her face, in the sewing circle, when she had been talking for a good hour about the coffin-plates, declaring them to be grewsome and shocking, that, for her part, she did not care for them, did not have one in her house—though every one of her relations were dead, and she might have her walls covered with them—but she believed in respecting those who did; and it seemed to her that, however much anybody felt called upon to interfere with the ways of the living, the relics of the dead should be left alone. Flora concluded by saying that it seemed to her that if the Linnville folks let Mrs. Jame-

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son's bean-pots alone, she might keep her hands off their coffin-plates.

Mrs. Jameson was quite unmoved even by that. She said that Miss Clark did not realize, as she would do were her sphere wider, the incalculable harm that such a false standard of art might do in a community: that it might even pervert the morals.

"I guess if we don't have anything to hurt our morals any worse than our coffin-plates, we shall do," returned Flora. She said afterward that she felt just like digging up some of her own coffin-plates, and having them framed and hung up, and asking Mrs. Jameson to tea.

All through June and a part of July Louisa and I had seen the clandestine courtship between Harry Liscom and Harriet Jameson going on. We could scarcely help it. We kept wondering why neither Caroline Liscom nor Mrs. Jameson seemed aware of it. Of course, Mrs. Jameson was so occupied with the village welfare

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that it might account for it in her case, but we were surprised that Caroline was so blinded. We both of us thought that she would be very much averse to the match, from her well-known opinion of the Jamesons; and it proved that she was. Everybody talked so much about Harry and his courtship of Harriet that it seemed incredible that Caroline should not hear of it, even if she did not see anything herself to awaken suspicion. We did not take into consideration the fact that a strong-minded woman like Caroline Liscom has difficulty in believing anything which she does not wish to be true, and that her will stands in her own way.

However, on Wednesday of the second week of July both she and Mrs. Jameson had their eyes opened perforce. It was a beautiful moonlight evening, and Louisa and I were sitting at the windows looking out and chatting peacefully. Little Alice had gone to bed, and we had not lit the lamp, it was so pleasant in the moonlight.

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Presently, about half-past eight o'clock, two figures strolled by, and we knew who they were.

"It is strange to me that Grandma Cobb does not find it out, if Mrs. Jameson is too wrapped up in her own affairs and with grafting ours into them," said Louisa thoughtfully.

I remarked that I should not be surprised if she did know; and it turned out afterward that it was so. Grandma Cobb had known all the time, and Harriet had gone through her room to get to the back stairs, down which she stole to meet Harry.

The young couple had not been long past when a stout, tall figure went hurriedly by with an angry flirt of skirts—short ones.

"Oh, dear, that is Mrs. Jameson!" cried Louisa.

We waited breathless. Harry and Harriet could have gone no farther than the grove, for in a very short time back they

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all came, Mrs. Jameson leading—almost pulling—along her daughter, and Harry pressing close at her side, with his arm half extended as if to protect his sweetheart. Mrs. Jameson kept turning and addressing him; we could hear the angry clearness of her voice, though we could not distinguish many words; and finally, when they were almost past we saw poor Harriet also turn to him, and we judged that she, as well as her mother, was begging him to go, for he directly caught her hand, gave it a kiss, said something which we almost caught, to the effect that she must not be afraid—he would take care that all came out right—and was gone.

“Oh, dear,” sighed Louisa, and I echoed her. I did pity the poor young things.

To our surprise, and also to our dismay, it was not long before we saw Mrs. Jameson hurrying back, and she turned in at our gate.

Louisa jumped and lighted the lamp,

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and I set the rocking-chair for Mrs. Jameson.

"No, I can't sit down," said she, waving her hand. "I am too much disturbed to sit down," but even as she said that she did drop into the rocking-chair. Louisa said afterward that Mrs. Jameson was one who always would sit down during all the vicissitudes of life, no matter how hard she took them.

Mrs. Jameson was very much disturbed; we had never seen her calm superiority so shaken; it actually seemed as if she realized for once that she was not quite the peer of circumstances, as Louisa said.

"I wish to inquire if you have known long of this shameful clandestine love affair of my daughter's?" said she, and Louisa and I were nonplussed. We did not know what to say. Luckily, Mrs. Jameson did not wait for an answer; she went on to pour her grievance into our ears, without even stopping to be sure

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whether they were sympathizing ones or not.

"My daughter cannot marry into one of these village families," said she, without apparently the slightest consideration of the fact that we were a village family. "My daughter has been very differently brought up. I have other views for her; it is impossible; it must be understood at once that I will not have it."

Mrs. Jameson was still talking, and Louisa and I listening with more of dismay than sympathy, when who should walk in but Caroline Liscom herself.

She did not knock—she never does; she opened the door with no warning whatsoever, and stood there.

Louisa turned pale, and I know I must have. I could not command my voice, though I tried hard to keep calm.

I said "Good-morning," when it should have been "Good-evening," and placed Alice's little chair, in which she could not by any possibility sit, for Caroline.

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"No, I don't want to sit down," said Caroline, and she kept her word better than Mrs. Jameson. She turned directly to the latter. "I have just been over to your house," said she, "and they told me that you had come over here. I want to say something to you, and that is, I don't want my son to marry your daughter, and I will never give my consent to it, never, never!"

Mrs. Jameson's face was a study. For a minute she had not a word to say; she only gasped. Finally she spoke. "You can be no more unwilling to have your son marry my daughter than I am to have my daughter marry your son," said she.

Then Caroline said something unexpected. "I would like to know what you have against my son, as fine a young man as there is anywhere about, I don't care who he is," said she.

And Mrs. Jameson said something unexpected. "I should like to inquire

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what you have against my daughter?" said she.

"Well, I'll tell you one thing," returned Caroline; "she doesn't know enough to keep a doll-baby's house, and she ain't neat."

Mrs. Jameson choked; it did not seem as if she could reply in her usual manner to such a plain statement of objections. She and Caroline glared at each other a minute; then to our great relief, for no one wants her house turned into the seat of war, Caroline simply repeated, "I shall never give my consent to have my son marry your daughter," and went out.

Mrs. Jameson did not stay long after that. She rose, saying that her nerves were very much shaken, and that she felt it sad that all her efforts for the welfare and improvement of the village should have ended in this, and bade us a mournful good-evening and left.

Louisa and I had an impression that she held us in some way responsible, and

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we could not see why, though I did reflect guiltily how I had asked the lovers into my house that October night. Louisa and I agreed that, take it altogether, we had never seen so much mutual love and mutual scorn in two families.

VI

THE CENTENNIAL

THE older one grows, the less one wonders at the sudden, inconsequent turns which an apparently reasonable person will make in a line of conduct. Still I must say that I was not prepared for what Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson did in about a week after she had declared that her daughter should never marry Harry Liscom: capitulated entirely, and gave her consent.

It was Grandma Cobb who brought us the news, coming in one morning before we had our breakfast dishes washed.

"My daughter told Harriet last night that she had written to her father and he had no objections, and that she would withdraw hers on further consideration,"

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said Grandma Cobb, with a curious, unconscious imitation of Mrs. Jameson's calm state of manner. Then she at once relapsed into her own. "My daughter says that she is convinced that the young man is worthy, though he is not socially quite what she might desire, and she does not feel it right to part them if they have a true affection for each other," said Grandma Cobb. Then she added, with a shake of her head and a gleam of malicious truth in her blue eyes: "That is not the whole of it; Robert Browning was the means of bringing it about."

"Robert Browning!" I repeated. I was bewildered, and Louisa stared at me in a frightened way. She said afterward that she thought for a minute that Grandma Cobb was out of her head.

But Grandma Cobb went on to explain. "Yes, my daughter seems to look upon Robert Browning as if everything he said was written on tables of stone," said she; "and last night she had a letter from Mrs.

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Addison Sears, who feels just the same way. My daughter had written her about Harriet's love affair, and this was in answer. Mrs. Sears dwelt a good deal upon Mr. Browning's own happy marriage; and then she quoted passages; and my daughter became convinced that Robert Browning would have been in favor of the match,—and that settled it. My daughter proves things by Browning almost the same way as people do by Scripture, it seems to me sometimes. I am thankful that it has turned out so," Grandma Cobb went on to say, "for I like the young man myself; and as for Harriet, her mind is set on him, and she's something like me: once get her mind set on anybody, that's the end of it. My daughter has got the same trait, but it works the contrary way: when she once gets her mind set against anybody, that's the end of it unless Robert Browning steps in to turn her."

Louisa and I were heartily glad to hear

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of Mr. Browning's unconscious intercession and its effect upon Mrs. Jameson, but we wondered what Caroline Liscom would say.

"It will take more than passages of poetry to move her," said Louisa when Grandma Cobb had gone.

All we could do was to wait for developments concerning Caroline. Then one day she came in and completely opened her heart to us with that almost alarming frankness which a reserved woman often displays if she does lose her self-restraint.

"I can't have it anyhow," said Caroline Liscom; and I must say I did pity her, though I had a weakness for little Harriet. "I feel as if it would kill me if Harry marries that girl—and I am afraid he will; but it shall never be with my consent, and he shall never bring her to my house while I am in it."

Then Caroline went on to make revelations about Harriet which were actually

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dire accusations from a New England housewife like her.

"It was perfectly awful the way her room looked while she was at my house," said Caroline; "and she doesn't know how to do one thing about a house. She can't make a loaf of bread to save her life, and she has no more idea how to sweep a room and dust it than a baby. I had it straight from Hannah Bell that she dusted her room and swept it afterward. Think of my boy, brought up the way he has been, everything as neat as wax, if I do say it, and his victuals always cooked nice, and ready when he wanted them, marrying a girl like that. I can't and I won't have it. It's all very well now, he's captivated by a pretty face; but wait a little, and he'll find out there's something else. He'll find out there's comfort to be considered as well as love. And she don't even know how to do plain sewing. Only look at the bottoms of her dresses, with the braid hanging; and I know

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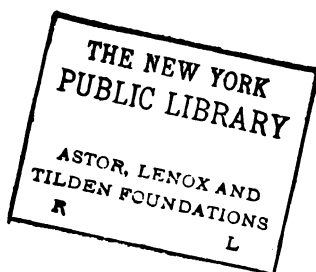
she never mends her stockings—I had it from the woman who washes them. Only think of my son, who has always had his stockings mended as smooth as satin, either going with holes in them, or else having them gathered up in hard bunches and getting corns. I can't and I won't have it!"

Caroline finished all her remarks with that, setting her mouth hard. It was evident that she was firm in her decision. I suggested mildly that the girl had never been taught, and had always had so much money that she was excusable for not knowing how to do all these little things which the Linnville girls had been forced to do.

"I know all that," said Caroline; "I am not blaming her so much as I am her mother. She had better have stopped reading Browning and improving her own mind and the village, and improved her own daughter, so she could walk in the way Providence has set for a woman



**“We thought it exceedingly appropriate that the Jamesons should ride in the procession
with the minister and the lawyers.”**



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without disgracing herself. But I am looking at her as she is, without any question of blame, for the sake of my son. He shall not marry a girl who don't know how to make his home comfortable any better than she does—not if his mother can save him from it.”

Louisa asked timidly—we were both of us rather timid, Caroline was so fierce—if she did not think she could teach Harriet.

“I don't know whether I can or not!” said Caroline. “Anyway, I am not going to try. What kind of a plan would it be for me to have her in the house teaching her, where Harry could see her every day, and perhaps after all find out that it would not amount to anything. I'd rather try to cure drink than make a good housewife of a girl who hasn't been brought up to it. How do I know it's in her? And there I would have her right under Harry's nose. She shall never marry him; I can't and I won't have it.”

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Louisa and I speculated as to whether Caroline would be able to help it, when she had taken her leave after what seemed to us must have been a most unsatisfactory call, with not enough sympathy from us to cheer her.

"Harry Liscom has a will, as well as his mother, and he is a man grown, and running the woollen factory on shares with his father, and able to support a wife. I don't believe he is going to stop, now the girl's mother has consented, because his mother tells him to," said Louisa; and I thought she was right.

That very evening Harry went past to the Jamesons, in his best suit, carrying a cane, which he swung with the assured air of a young man going courting where he is plainly welcome.

"I am glad for one thing," said I, "and that is there is no more secret strolling in my grove, but open sitting up in her mother's parlor."

Louisa looked at me a little uncertain-

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ly, and I saw that there was something which she wanted to say and did not quite dare.

"What is it?" said I.

"Well," said Louisa, hesitatingly, "I was thinking that I supposed—I don't know that it would work at all—maybe her mother wouldn't be willing, and maybe she wouldn't be willing herself—but I was thinking that you were as good a housekeeper as Caroline Liscom, and—you might have the girl in here once in a while and teach her."

"I will do it," said I at once,—“if I can, that is.”

I found out that I could. The poor child was only too glad to come to my house and take a few lessons in house-keeping. I waylaid her when she was going past one day, and broached the subject delicately. I said it was a good idea for a young girl to learn as much as she could about keeping a house nice before she had one of her own, and Harriet

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blushed as red as a rose and thanked me, and arranged to come for her first lesson the very next morning. I got a large gingham apron for her, and we began. I gave her a lesson in bread-making that very day, and found her an apt pupil. I told her that she would make a very good housekeeper—I should not wonder if as good as Mrs. Liscom, who was, I considered, the best in the village; and she blushed again and kissed me.

Louisa and I had been a little worried as to what Mrs. Jameson would say; but we need not have been. Mrs. Jameson was strenuously engaged in uprooting poison-ivy vines, which grew thickly along the walls everywhere in the village. I must say it seemed Scriptural to me, and made me think better in one way of Mrs. Jameson, since it did require considerable heroism.

Luckily, old Martin was one of the few who are exempt from the noxious influence of poison-ivy, and he pulled up

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the roots with impunity, but I must say without the best success. Poison-ivy is a staunch and persistent thing, and more than a match for Mrs. Jameson. She suffered herself somewhat in the conflict, and went about for some time with her face and hands done up in castor-oil, which we consider a sovereign remedy for poison-ivy. Cobb, too, was more or less a victim to his mother's zeal for up-rooting noxious weeds.

It was directly after the poison-ivy that Mrs. Jameson made what may be considered her grand attempt of the season. All at once she discovered what none of the rest of us had thought of—I suppose we must have been lacking in public feeling not to have done so—that our village had been settled exactly one hundred years ago that very August.

Mrs. Jameson came into our house with the news on the twenty-seventh day of July. She had just found it out in an old book which had been left be-

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hind and forgotten in the garret of the Wray house.

"We must have a centennial, of course," said she magisterially.

Louisa and I stared at her. "A centennial!" said I feebly. I think visions of Philadelphia, and exhibits of the products of the whole world in our fields and cow-pastures, floated through my mind. Centennial had a stupendous sound to me, and Louisa said afterward it had to her.

"How would you make it?" asked Louisa vaguely of Mrs. Jameson, as if a centennial were a loaf of gingerbread.

Mrs. Jameson had formed her plans with the rapidity of a great general on the eve of a forced battle. "We will take the oldest house in town," said she promptly. "I think that it is nearly as old as the village, and we will fit it up as nearly as possible like a house of one hundred years ago, and we will hold our celebration there."

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"Let me see, the oldest house is the Shaw house," said I.

"Why, Emily Shaw is living there," said Louisa in wonder.

"We shall make arrangements with her," returned Mrs. Jameson, with confidence. She looked around our sitting-room, and eyed our old-fashioned high-boy, of which we are very proud, and an old-fashioned table which becomes a chair when properly manipulated. "Those will be just the things to go in one of the rooms," said she, without so much as asking our leave.

"Emily Shaw's furniture will have to be put somewhere if so many other things are to be moved in," suggested Louisa timidly; but Mrs. Jameson dismissed that consideration with merely a wave of her hand.

"I think that Mrs. Simeon White has a swell-front bureau and an old looking-glass which will do very well for one of the chambers," she went on to say, "and

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Miss Clark has a mahogany table." Mrs. Jameson went on calmly enumerating articles of old-fashioned furniture which she had seen in our village houses which she considered suitable to be used in the Shaw house for the centennial.

"I don't see how Emily Shaw is going to live there while all this is going on," remarked Louisa in her usual deprecatory tone when addressing Mrs. Jameson.

"I think we may be able to leave her one room," said Mrs. Jameson; and Louisa and I fairly gasped when we reflected that Emily Shaw had not yet heard a word of the plan.

"I don't know but Emily Shaw will put up with it, for she is pretty meek," said Louisa when Mrs. Jameson had gone hurrying down the street to impart her scheme to others; "but it is lucky for Mrs. Jameson that Flora Clark hasn't the oldest house in town."

I said I doubted if Flora would even consent to let her furniture be displayed

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in the centennial; but she did. Everybody consented to everything. I don't know whether Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson had really any hypnotic influence over us, or whether we had a desire for the celebration, but the whole village marshalled and marched to her orders with the greatest docility. All our cherished pieces of old furniture were loaded into carts and conveyed to the old Shaw house.

The centennial was to be held the tenth day of August, and there was necessarily quick work. The whole village was in an uproar; none of us who had old-fashioned possessions fairly knew where we were living, so many of them were in the Shaw house; we were short of dishes and bureau drawers, and counterpanes and curtains. Mrs. Jameson never asked for any of these things; she simply took them as by right of war, and nobody gainsaid her, not even Flora Clark. However, poor Emily Shaw was

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the one who displayed the greatest meekness under provocation. The whole affair must have seemed revolutionary to her. She was a quiet, delicate little woman, no longer young. She did not go out much, not even to the sewing circle or the literary society, and seemed as fond of her home as an animal of its shell—as if it were a part of her. Old as her house was, she had it fitted up in a modern, and, to our village ideas, a very pretty fashion. Emily was quite well-to-do. There were nice tapestry carpets on all the downstairs floors, lace curtains at the windows, and furniture covered with red velvet in the parlor. She had also had the old fireplaces covered up and marble slabs set. There was handsome carved black walnut furniture in the chambers; and taken altogether, the old Shaw house was regarded as one of the best furnished in the village. Mrs. Sim White said she didn't know as she wondered that Emily didn't like to go away from such nice things.

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Now every one of these nice things was hustled out of sight to make room for the pieces of old-fashioned furniture. The tapestry carpets were taken up and stowed away in the garrets, the lace curtains were pulled down. In their stead were the old sanded bare floors and curtains of homespun linen trimmed with hand-knitted lace. Emily's nice Marseilles counterpanes were laid aside for the old blue-and-white ones which our grandmothers spun and wove, and her fine oil paintings gave way to old engravings of Webster death-bed scenes and portraits of the Presidents, and samplers. Emily was left one room to herself—a little back chamber over the kitchen—and she took her meals at Flora Clark's, next door. She was obliged to do that, for her kitchen range had been taken down, and there was only the old fireplace furnished with kettles and crane to cook in.

"I suppose my forefathers used to get all their meals there," said poor Emily

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Shaw, who has at all times a gentle, sad way of speaking, and then seemed on the verge of uncomplaining tears, "but I don't quite feel competent to undertake it now. It looks to me as if the kettles might be hard to lift." Emily glanced at her hands and wrists as she spoke. Emily's hands and arms are very small and bony, as she is in her general construction, though she is tall.

The little chamber which she inhabited during the preparation for the centennial was very hot in those midsummer days, and her face was always suffused with a damp pink when she came out of it; but she uttered no word of complaint, not even when they took down her marble slabs and exposed the yawning mouths of the old fireplaces again. All she said was once in a deprecatory whisper to me, to the effect that she was a little sorry to have strangers see her house looking so, but she supposed it was interesting.

We expected a number of strangers.

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Mrs. Sim White's brother, who had gone to Boston when he was a young man and turned out so smart, being the head of a large dry-goods firm, was coming, and was to make a speech; and Mr. Elijah M. Mills, whose mother's people came from Linnville, was to be there, as having a hereditary interest in the village. Of course, everybody knows Elijah M. Mills. He was to make a speech. Mrs. Lucy Beers Wright, whose aunt on her father's side, Miss Jane Beers, used to live in Linnville before she died, was to come and read some selections from her own works. Mrs. Lucy Beers Wright writes quite celebrated stories, and reads them almost better than she writes them. She has enormous prices, too, but she promised to come to the centennial and read for nothing; she used to visit her aunt in Linnville when she was a girl, and wrote that she had a sincere love for the dear old place. Mrs. Jameson said that we were very fortunate to get her.

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Mrs. Jameson did not stop, however, at celebrities of local traditions; she flew higher still. She wrote the Governor of the State, inviting him to be present, and some of us were never quite certain that she did not invite the President of the United States. However, if she had done so, it seemed incredible that since he was bidden by Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson he neither came nor wrote a letter. The Governor of the State did not come, but he wrote a very handsome letter, expressing the most heartfelt disappointment that he was unable to be present on such an occasion; and we all felt very sorry for him when we heard it read. Mrs. Sim White said that a governor's life must be a hard one, he must have to deny himself many pleasures. Our minister, the Rev. Henry P. Jacobs, wrote a long poem to be read on the occasion; it was in blank verse like Young's "Night Thoughts," and some thought he had imitated it; but it was generally consid-

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ered very fine, though we had not the pleasure of hearing it at the centennial—why, I will explain later.

There was to be a grand procession, of course, illustrative of the arts, trades, and professions in our village a hundred years ago and at the present time, and Mrs. Jameson engineered that. I never saw a woman work as she did. Louisa and I agreed that she could not be so very delicate after all. She had a finger in everything except the cooking; that she left mostly to the rest of us, though she did break over in one instance to our sorrow. We made pound-cake, and cup-cake, and Indian puddings, and pies, and we baked beans enough for a standing army. Of course, the dinner was to be after the fashion of one of a hundred years ago. The old oven in the Shaw kitchen was to be heated, and Indian puddings and pies baked in it; but that would not hold enough for such a multitude as we expected, so we all baked at home—that is,

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all except Caroline Liscom. She would not bake a thing because Mrs. Jameson got up the centennial, and she declared that she would not go. However, she changed her mind, which was fortunate enough as matters afterward transpired.

The tenth of August, which was the one hundredth anniversary of the settlement of our village, dawned bright and clear, for which we were thankful, though it was very hot. The exercises were to begin at eleven o'clock in the morning with the procession. We were to assemble at the old Shaw house at half-past twelve; the dinner was to be at half-past one, after an hour of social intercourse which would afford people an opportunity of viewing the house, and a few of us an opportunity of preparing the dinner. After dinner were to be the speeches and readings, which must be concluded in season for the out-of-town celebrities to take the Grover stage-coach to connect with the railroad train.

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By eight o'clock people began to arrive from other villages, and to gather on the street corners to view the procession. It was the very first procession ever organized in our village, and we were very proud of it. For the first time Mrs. Jameson began to be regarded with real gratitude and veneration as a local benefactress. We told all the visitors that Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson got up the centennial, and we were proud that she was one of us when we saw her driving past in the procession. We thought it exceedingly appropriate that the Jamesons—Mr. Jameson had come on from New York for the occasion—should ride in the procession with the minister and the lawyer in a barouche from Grover. Barouches seemed that day to be illustrative of extremest progress in carriages, in contrast with the old Linnville and Wardville stage-coaches, and the old chaise and doctor's sulky, all of which had needed to be repaired with infinite

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care, and were driven with gingerly foresight, lest they fall to pieces on the line of march. We really pitied the village doctor in the aged sulky, for it seemed as if he might have to set a bone for himself by reason of the sudden and total collapse of his vehicle. Mrs. Jameson had decreed that he should ride in it, however, and there was no evading her mandate.

Mrs. Jameson looked very imposing in her barouche, and we were glad that she wore one of her handsome black silks instead of her sensible short costume. There was a good deal of jet about the waist, and her bonnet was all made of jet, with a beautiful tuft of pink roses on the front, and she glittered resplendently as she rode past, sitting up very straight, as befitted the dignity of the occasion.

"That is Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson," said we, and we mentioned incidentally that the gentleman beside her was Mr. Jameson. We were not as proud of

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him, since all that he had done which we knew of was to lose all his money and have his friends get him a place in the custom-house; he was merely a satellite of his wife, who had gotten up our centennial.

Words could not express the admiration which we all felt for the procession. It was really accomplished in a masterly manner, especially taking into consideration the shortness of the time for preparation; but that paled beside the wonders of the old Shaw house. I was obliged to be in the kitchen all during that hour of inspection and social intercourse, but I could hear the loud bursts of admiration. The house seemed full of exclamation-points. Flora Clark said for her part she could not see why folks could not look at a thing and think it was pretty without screaming; but she was tired, and probably a little vexed at herself for working so hard when Mrs. Jameson had gotten up the centennial. It was very warm in

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drive in the ancient sulky, had a night of toil. Caleb—commonly called Kellup—Bates, and his son Thomas, were the principal sufferers, they being notorious eaters and the terrors of sewing-circle suppers. Flora Clark confessed to me that she was relieved when she saw them out again, since she had passed the pies to them three times, thinking that such devourers would stop at nothing and she might as well save the delicacies for the more temperate.

We were so thankful that none of the out-of-town celebrities ate Mrs. Jameson's chicken pies, since they had a rather unfortunate experience as it was. The dinner was a very great success, and Flora Clark said to me that if people a hundred years ago ate those hearty, nourishing victuals as these people did, she didn't wonder that the men had strength to found a Republic, but she did wonder how the women folks who had to cook for them had time and strength to live.

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After dinner the speechifying began. The Rev. Henry P. Jacobs made the opening address; we had agreed that he should be invited to do so, since he was the minister. He asked the blessing before we began to eat, and made the opening address afterward. Mr. Jacobs is considered a fine speaker, and he is never at a loss for ideas. We all felt proud of him as he stood up and began to speak of the state of the Linnville church a hundred years ago, and contrasted those days of fireless meeting-houses with the comforts of the sanctuary at the present time. He also had a long list of statistics. I began at last to feel a little uneasy lest he might read his poem, and so rob the guests who were to speak of their quotas of time. Louisa said she thought he was intending to, but she saw Mrs. Jameson whisper to her husband, who immediately tiptoed around to him with a scared and important look, and said something in a low voice. Then the minister, with a

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somewhat crestfallen air, curtailed his remarks, saying something about his hoping to read a poem a little later on that auspicious occasion, but that he would now introduce Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson, to whom they were all so much indebted.

Mrs. Jameson arose and bowed to the company, and adjusted her eyeglasses. Her jets glittered, her eyes shone with a commanding brightness, and she really looked very imposing. After a few words, which even Flora Clark acknowledged were very well chosen, she read the Governor's letter with great impressiveness. Then she went on to read other letters from people who were noteworthy in some way and had some association with the village. Flora Clark said that she believed that Mrs. Jameson had written to every celebrity whose grandfather ever drove through Linnville. She did have a great many letters from people who we were surprised to hear had ever

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heard of us, and they were very interesting. Still it did take time to read them; and after she had finished them all, Mrs. Jameson commenced to speak on her own account. She had some notes which she consulted unobtrusively from time to time. She dwelt mainly upon the vast improvement for the better in our condition during the last hundred years. She mentioned in this connection Robert Browning, the benefit of whose teaching was denied our ancestors of a hundred years ago. She also mentioned hygienic bread as a contrast to the heavy, indigestible masses of corn-meal concoctions and the hurtful richness of pound-cake. Mrs. Jameson galloped with mild state all her little hobbies for our delectation, and the time went on. We had sat very long at dinner; it was later than we had planned when the speechifying began. Mrs. Jameson did not seem to be in the least aware of the flight of time as she peacefully proceeded; nor did she see how we

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were all fidgeting. Still, nobody spoke to her; nobody quite dared, and then we thought every sentence would be her last.

The upshot of it was that the Grover stage-coach arrived, and Mrs. Sim White's brother, Elijah M. Mills, and Mrs. Lucy Beers Wright, besides a number of others of lesser fame, were obliged to leave without raising their voices, or lose their trains, which for such busy people was not to be thought of. There was much subdued indignation and discomfiture among us, and I dare say among the guests themselves. Mrs. Lucy Beers Wright was particularly haughty, even to Mrs. Sim White, who did her best to express her regret without blaming Mrs. Jameson. As for Elijah M. Mills, Louisa said she heard him say something which she would not repeat, when he was putting on his hat. He is a fine speaker, and noted for the witty stories which he tells; we felt that we had missed a great deal. I must say, to do her justice, that

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Mrs. Jameson seemed somewhat perturbed, and disposed to be conciliating when she bade the guests good-by; she was even apologetic in her calmly superior way.

However, the guests had not been gone long before something happened to put it all out of our minds for the time. The Rev. Henry P. Jacobs had just stood up again, with a somewhat crestfallen air, to read his poem—I suppose he was disappointed to lose the more important part of his audience—when there was a little scream, and poor Harriet Jameson was all in a blaze. She wore a white muslin dress, and somehow it had caught—I suppose from a spark; she had been sitting near the hearth, though we had thought the fire was out. Harry Liscom made one spring for her when he saw what had happened; but he had not been very near her, and a woman was before him. She caught up the braided rug from the floor, and in a second Harriet

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was borne down under it, and then Harry was there with his coat, and Sim White, and the fire was out. Poor Harriet was not much hurt, only a few trifling burns; but if it had not been for the woman she might easily have gotten her death, and our centennial ended in a tragedy.

It had all been done so quickly that we had not fairly seen who the woman who snatched up the rug was, but when the fire was out we knew: Caroline Liscom. She was somewhat burned herself, too, but she did not seem to mind that at all. She was, to our utter surprise—for we all knew how she had felt about Harry's marrying Harriet—cuddling the girl in her motherly arms, the sleeves of her best black grenadine being all scorched, too, and telling her that she must not be frightened, the fire was all out, and calling her my dear child, and kissing her. I, for one, never knew that Caroline Liscom could display so much warmth of

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love and pity, and that toward a girl whom she was determined her son should not marry, and before so many. I suppose when she saw the poor child all in a blaze, and thought she would be burned to death, her heart smote her, and she felt that she would do anything in the world if she only lived.

Harry Liscom was as white as a sheet. Once or twice he tried to push his mother away, as if he wished to do the comforting and cuddling himself; but she would not have it. "Poor child! poor child!" she kept repeating; "it's all over, don't be frightened," as if Harriet had been a baby.

Then Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson came close to Caroline Liscom, and tears were running down her cheeks quite openly. She did not even have out her handkerchief, and she threw her arms right around the other woman who had saved her daughter. "God bless you! Oh, God bless you!" she said; then her

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voice broke and she sobbed out loud. I think a good many of us joined her. As for Caroline Liscom, she sort of pushed Harriet toward her son, and then she threw her poor, scorched arms around Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson and kissed her. "Oh, let us both thank God!" sobbed Caroline.

As soon as we got calm enough we took Harriet upstairs; her pretty muslin was fluttering around her in yellow rags, and the slight burns needed attention; she was also exhausted with the nervous shock, and was trembling like a leaf, her cheeks white and her eyes big with terror. Caroline Liscom and her mother came too, and Caroline concealed her burns until Harriet's were dressed. Luckily, the doctor was there. Then Harriet was induced to lie down on the north chamber bed on the old blue-and-white counterpane that Mrs. Sim White's mother spun and wove.

Rev. Henry P. Jacobs did not read his

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poem; we were too much perturbed to listen to it, and nobody mentioned it to him. Flora Clark whispered to me that if he began she should go home; for her part, she felt as if she had gone through enough that day without poetry. The poem was delivered by special request at our next sewing circle, but I think the minister was always disappointed, though he strove to bear it with Christian grace. However, within three months he had to console him a larger wedding fee than often falls to a minister in Linnville.

The centennial dissolved soon after the burning accident. There was nothing more to do but to put the Shaw house to rights again and restore the various articles to their owners, which, of course, could not be done that day, nor for many days to come. I think I never worked harder in my life than I did setting things to rights after our centennial; but I had one consolation through it, and that was the happiness of the two young things,

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who had had indirectly their love tangle smoothed out by it.

Caroline Liscom and Mrs. Jameson were on the very best of terms, and Harriet was running over to Caroline's house to take lessons in housekeeping, instead of to mine, before the week was out.

There was a beautiful wedding the last of October, and young Mrs. Harry Liscom has lived in our midst ever since, being considered one of the most notable housekeepers in the village for her age. She and her husband live with Caroline Liscom, and Louisa says sometimes that she believes Caroline loves the girl better than she does her own son, and that she fairly took her into her heart when she saved her life.

"Some women can't love anybody except their own very much unless they can do something for them," says Louisa; and I don't know but she is right.

The Jamesons are still with us every summer—even Grandma Cobb, who does

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not seem to grow feeble at all. Sarah is growing to be quite a pretty girl, and there is a rumor that Charlie White is attentive to her, though they are both almost too young to think of such things. Cobb is a very nice boy, and people say they had as soon have him come in and sit a while and talk, as a girl. As for Mrs. Jameson, she still tries to improve us at times, not always with our full concurrence, and her ways are still not altogether our ways, provoking mirth, or calling for charity. Yet I must say we have nowadays a better understanding of her good motives, having had possibly our spheres enlarged a little by her, after all, and having gained broader views from the points of view of people outside our narrow lives. I think we most of us are really fond of Mrs. H. Boardman Jameson, and are very glad that the Jamesons came to our village.

THE END







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